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ARD

BRIANTE SWEET
AND OTHER PLAYS



Bitter Sweet and Other Plays

Coward, Noel
1929

DATE

BORROWER'S NAME

To a better playright, my
George.

From Gladys

George Savage

Christmas 1930

B I T T E R S W E E T

And Other Plays

**BITTER SWEET
AND OTHER PLAYS
BY NOEL COWARD**

WITH A FEW COMMENTS ON
THE YOUNGER DRAMATISTS
BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM



DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
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INTRODUCTION

BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

THE day is no longer approaching; the day has come. Henrik Ibsen put his own forebodings into the mouth of his master builder. He foresaw that the younger generation would come knocking at his door and shaking their fists shout: make room, make room, make room. "Then there's an end of Halvard Solness." For us English dramatists the younger generation has assumed the brisk but determined form of Mr. Noel Coward. He knocked at the door with impatient knuckles, and then he rattled the handle, and then he burst in. After a moment's stupor the older playwrights welcomed him affably enough and retired with what dignity they could muster to the shelf which with a sprightly gesture he indicated to them as their proper place. For my part I have made myself quite comfortable there. The knowing Lucretius in a passage that has given the world a little shiver ever since it was written remarked that it was sweet, when on the great sea the winds troubled the waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; "not that it is a pleasure and delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is

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sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of war arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger." But I look upon it as a very graceful attention on Mr. Coward's part to reach up to my shelf with a volume of his plays and flatter me with the request that I should write a preface to them. I sit up and let my legs dangle in the air. I let myself down cautiously to the floor and give it a stamp to feel that it is really solid under my feet. And now as with a palsied hand I take up my pen I have just the sort of sensation I can imagine a man having who goes to lunch with his former wife and her second husband. It must be curious and entertaining for him to see from another angle circumstances with which he is so familiar and I suspect that he allows himself an inward chuckle when he considers that in a few minutes after he has drunk his coffee he will find himself once more in the open street. But his successor remains behind.

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis. . . .

It would be foolish of me to write a criticism of the three plays in this volume. The reader will read them and unless he is very silly he will not let my opinion of them in the least influence him. The critic whose judgment you trust may render you the service of putting you on to a book you would otherwise have neglected, but when he has done that the only thing that matters is what the book means to you. It may be a masterpiece, but if it

gives you nothing you have only wasted your time in reading it.

I should like, however, to say a little on a matter that has of late exercised the critics and the dramatists, since I venture to think that it is one upon which the future of the English drama depends. And since there is no one now writing who has more obviously a gift for the theatre than Mr. Noel Coward, nor more influence with young writers, it is probably his inclination and practice that will be responsible for the manner in which plays will be written during the next twenty years.

Mr. St. John Ervine published a few months ago a little book called *How to Write a Play*. Mr. Ervine is a dramatist as well as a critic and his book is pithy and sensible. It is a work that any writer for the theatre can study with profit. He has exploded the fallacy that there is something mysterious in dramatic technique. Ponderous tomes have been written on the subject by persons who did not know what they were talking about. It is evident that people who have no feeling for the theatre will find it very difficult to write a play, just as people who have no ear will never understand music, and I think it may be admitted that to write a play requires a peculiar gift. It is not a very exalted one, for it can exist without intelligence or originality (one of the most distinguished dramatists of the last generation had the mind and the education of a bartender and wrote notwithstanding

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clever and charming plays); I think it would be better to call it a peculiar knack. I suspect that the whole secret of dramatic technique can be told in a sentence: stick to the point like grim death. But I mention this book of Mr. Ervine's now because he has some interesting things to say about dialogue and especially about Mr. Noel Coward's. It is in his dialogue that Mr. Coward has shown himself something of an innovator, for in his construction he has been content to use the current method of his day; he has deliberately avoided the epigram that was the fashion thirty years ago (when an early play of mine, *Lady Frederick*, was bought by Mr. George Tyler he told me that it was not epigrammatic enough, so I went away and in two hours wrote in twenty-four), and has written dialogue that is strictly faithful to fact. It does not only represent everyday language but reproduces it. No one has carried naturalistic dialogue further than he. Mr. St. John Ervine attacks it. He finds it commonplace and dull. He gives a passage from "*Home Chat*" and another from "*This was a Man*" to make his point and similar passages could certainly be found in any of the three plays in this volume. He contends that the dramatist should "heighten and lengthen and deepen the common speech, and yet leave it seeming to be the common speech."

Dialogue has gradually been growing more natural. It was inevitable that some dramatist should eventually write dialogue that exactly copied the average talk, with

its hesitations, mumblings and repetitions, and broken sentences, of average people. I do not suppose anyone can ever do this with more brilliant accuracy than Mr. Coward. My only objection to it is that it adds greatly to the difficulty of the author's task. It is evident that when he represents dull and stupid people they will be as stupid and dull on the stage as in real life and they will bore us in the same way. When he exposes his theme or joins together the various parts of his story (and I should think it was impossible to write a play in which certain explanations, of no interest in themselves, can be avoided) he will only with difficulty hold the attention of his audience. The author limits himself to characters who are in themselves exciting or amusing and to a theme which is from the beginning of the first act to the end of the last naturally absorbing. It is asking a great deal. I may point out in passing that as Ibsen's dialogue grew more naturalistic he was led to deal with singularly abnormal characters. On the other hand I do not think it can be denied that when a scene is dramatic naturalistic dialogue vastly enhances its effectiveness. You have a very good example in the last scene of the second act of *Easy Virtue*. Its dramatic value is greatly heightened by the perfect naturalness of the dialogue. In the same play the value of the beautifully drawn character of Marian Whittaker is increased by the absolute fidelity with which her conversation is reproduced. I do not know that Mr. Coward has ever created

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a personage more vivid, pathetic, abominable and true than this. When the characters and the theme allow, as in *Hay Fever*, the naturalistic dialogue can produce a masterpiece in miniature. But I have an impression that Mr. Coward has gone as far as anyone can go in this direction. A blank wall faces him. There is less difference between Mr. Ervine and Mr. Coward than Mr. Ervine seems to think. One seeks to reproduce dialogue; the other to represent it. I wonder if here too you do not come upon a blank wall. I wonder if the current fashion to be slangy and brief and incoherent has not blinded the dramatists to the fact that a great many people do talk grammatically, do choose their words, and do make use of expressions that on the stage would be thought "bookish." It has seemed to me that during the last twenty years or so the increase of reading has affected current speech. If Mr. Ervine read a shorthand report of his own conversation over the luncheon table he would be surprised to find how "bookish" it was. If he spent an evening in a public house in Lambeth he would be surprised to discover how unusual were the words and complicated the phrases, learnt from the Sunday papers and the films, he would hear from the people standing around him. The present mode in dialogue debars the writer from introducing into his play educated people who express themselves in an educated way. It may be true that the English are a tongue-tied people but are they so tongue-tied as all that? Listen to

the conversation of barristers, doctors, politicians, parsons, and you will find that they express themselves quite naturally in a way that on the stage would be called absurdly literary. Stage dialogue has been simplified out of relation with all life but that of the cocktail bar. It seems to me a great loss.

It is evident that the cinema has had a great effect on the drama. In the first place it has quickened the apprehensions of the public so that they take a point very rapidly, and what a generation ago would have needed a long scene to explain can now be made plain in a couple of sentences. Further, it has done so many things better than the spoken drama can do them that it has made it futile for the spoken drama to attempt them. I suggest that the spoken drama must from now on look for its material only in places where the pictures cannot compete with it. They have made physical action more than a trifle tame, but the drama depends on action, and so it looks as though the drama must henceforward deal with action that is purely spiritual. Wit and emotion are demesnes that can never be taken away from it. Now wit is artificial. It has been my good fortune to know most of the celebrated wits of my day, but they sparkle very intermittently. No one in private life shines so continuously as a witty character should in a play, he is seldom so pointed, finished and apt. A play of wit demands an elaborate and polished dialogue which has little relation

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to the conversation of real life. When you come to the play of emotion the situation is more complicated. Mr. O'Neill in *Strange Interlude* dealt with it by making his characters say what he thought they would have said under the circumstances and then adding in an aside what they thought. It was an ingenious and interesting experiment, but I do not think that he or anyone else can repeat it. It seems to me plain that if he is seeking to represent states of mind and affections of the soul the dramatist is handicapping himself unnecessarily if he confines himself to the baldness of contemporary speech. I am not convinced that it is true to life, for my impression is that persons under stress of emotion express themselves with more fluency, elaboration, and often with more eloquence than is generally suspected. I do not see why the dramatist should not put into the mouth of his characters what they feel rather than what they say. It is true that for a moment an audience used to naturalistic dialogue would think the words they heard strange, but an audience can be coaxed or driven to accept any formula. After all copying life, representation, is merely an aesthetic procedure like another: naturalism is no more to be preferred to formalism than a leg of mutton is to be preferred to a sirloin of beef. Now that naturalistic dialogue has been carried as far as it can go I cannot but think it might be worth trying a dialogue that does not reproduce the conversation of the day and only very vaguely repre-

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sents it, but is deliberately and significantly formal. And since the future of the English drama is in the hands of Mr. Noel Coward this, as I climb back laboriously on to my shelf, with my blessing is the suggestion I offer him.

EASY VIRTUE

CHARACTERS

COLONEL WHITTAKER	
MRS. WHITTAKER	
JOHN	<i>Their son.</i>
MARION	<i>Their eldest daughter.</i>
HILDA	<i>Their youngest daughter.</i>
SARAH HURST	
CHARLES BURLEIGH	
PHILIP BORDON	
FURBER	
MR. HARRIS	
NINA VANSITTART	
THE HON. HUGH PETWORTH	
BOBBY COLEMAN	
LUCY COLEMAN	
HENRY FURLEY	
MARY BANFIELD	
MRS. HURST	
MRS. PHILLIPS	
LARITA WHITTAKER	

The action of the play takes place in the hall of COLONEL WHITTAKER's house in the country.

ACT I

The WHITTAKER's house is typical of wealthy upper-middle-class England. The furniture is good and the chintz obvious, but somehow right for the atmosphere. There are three French windows down the right-hand wall. A flight of stairs up L., with the lobby leading to the front door. Down L. double doors open into the dining-room. A big bureau where MRS. WHITTAKER does her accounts, etc., occupies a space between two of the windows. There is a comfortable sofa set in the centre, with a table behind it, on which are books and papers and flowers of some sort. A statuette of Venus de Milo on small pedestal L.

When curtain rises, it is a morning in early April. The hall looks quite gay with spring flowers, but rain can be seen beating against the windows.

MRS. WHITTAKER, attired in a tweed skirt, shirt-blouse, and a purple knitted sports-coat, is seated at her bureau. She is the type of woman who has the reputation of having been "quite lovely" as a girl. The stern repression of any sex emotions all her life has brought her to middle age with a faulty digestion which doesn't so much sour her temper as spread it. She views the world with the jaundiced eyes of a woman who subconsciously realises she has missed something, which means in point of fact that she has missed everything.

MARION is seated on the sofa, reading her letters. She is

largely made and pasty, with big lymphatic eyes. In fifteen years' time she will have the reputation of having been "quite lovely as a girl." Her clothes are slightly mannish.

COLONEL WHITTAKER is reading "*The Times*." He is a grey-haired man of about fifty—his expression is generally resigned.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I've written a strong letter to Mrs. Phillips.

MARION: What have you said?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Listen. (*She reads.*) "Dear Mrs. Phillips—I feel it my duty to write to you with regard to the advisability of sending the unfortunate Rose Jenkins to London. As you know, she was in my service for a year, and I was quite convinced when I discharged her that a girl of her character could ultimately come to no good. I was therefore extremely surprised when I heard that you had engaged her. As you have appealed to me for advice in the matter, I suggest that you should get rid of her at once, as her presence in the village might quite conceivably corrupt the morals of the other girls. I will endeavour to use my influence with Mrs. Faddle, who, as you know, is a prominent member of the Y.W.C.A., and perhaps later on a respectable berth of some sort may be obtained for her. I sadly fear, however, that our efforts on her behalf will be useless, as recent unpleasant events prove that the wretched girl is entirely devoid of any moral responsibility."

Sincerely yours,
Mabel Whittaker."

MARION: I must go and see Rose Jenkins, and have a talk to her.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm afraid you wouldn't do any good.

MARION: You never know. A straight-from-the-shoulder chat might make her see things in a better light.

COLONEL: Why not leave the poor girl alone?

MARION: Because, father, if there's any chance of helping someone to see the truth, I consider it shirking to disregard the opportunity.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It's no use arguing with your father, Marion—he doesn't understand.

COLONEL: No, I don't. What is the truth?

MRS. WHITTAKER: The truth is, Jim—that Rose Jenkins, by her immoral behaviour, has caused unpleasantness in the village, and therefore must suffer accordingly.

COLONEL: It's her own village—she was born here.

MRS. WHITTAKER: That's not the point.

COLONEL: Yes, it is—it's for her parents to decide what's to be done with her.

MARION: Mother's right, you know, father. It's better for her to be sent to London.

COLONEL: I'm glad you think so.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I wish you wouldn't be so tiresome, Jim dear. I'm sure I've enough worries and responsibilities without—

COLONEL: I fail to see that the Rose Jenkins business is any affair of yours—she isn't in your service any more.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I think we won't discuss it any further.

COLONEL: Very well, dear.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Do you think that letter's all right, Marion?

MARION: Perfectly. You've put it very clearly.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Mrs. Phillips is so hopelessly lacking in stamina. (*She puts letter in envelope and sticks it down.*)

COLONEL: I'm going down to see Preston for a minute.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You'd better tell him what we decided about that bed in front of the sundial.

COLONEL: All right. I suppose Hilda took the dogs with her to the post office, didn't she?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I expect so—you'll probably meet her.

COLONEL WHITTAKER *goes out.*

MARION: Poor old father.

MRS. WHITTAKER: He's so fearfully annoying about things.

MARION: Edgar's exactly the same. Men never will see.

MRS. WHITTAKER: When is Edgar coming back?

MARION: I don't know—I had a long letter from him this morning. It will mean another four or five months out there, I'm afraid.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Do you think he's really behaving himself?

MARION: I had a straight talk with him the day before he sailed—I think I made him realise things a bit better.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Who would have imagined he'd turn out like that?

MARION: Oh, Edgar's all right—it's his upbringing. We'll always be pals—he's not really a marrying man, you know. I think I realise that all along, and now I've found other things in life to occupy my mind, thank God!

MRS. WHITTAKER: It couldn't have been John's upbringing altogether—could it?

MARION: John's different—he's exactly like father.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes, I'm afraid he is.

MARION: He was always weak, you know.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I've tried to shut my eyes to it.

MARION: It's no use doing that, mother—everything must be faced.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I lie awake at nights, wondering what's going to happen eventually.

MARION: You mustn't worry.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Worry! It's on my mind always—naturally I've got over the first shock, to a large extent.

MARION: She may not be so bad, after all.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*bitterly*): It's the greatest catastrophe that ever happened—your father's affairs were nothing to this—nothing.

MARION: Have you heard from John lately?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Not since that postcard two weeks ago.

MARION: He's bound to bring her home soon.

MRS. WHITTAKER: He's taken good care to explain nothing about her in his letters. If he hadn't been apprehensive of what we should think of her, he would have brought her home at once, instead of waiting three months.

MARION: He did say she was ill.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Ill! Yes, I expect she was.

MARION: I'm glad I shall be here, anyhow.

MRS. WHITTAKER: So am I. I wouldn't have faced it alone—and Jim's no help; he never has been, especially over anything of this sort.

MARION: Is Sarah coming to-day?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes; she's bringing a man over to lunch—they've got a house full of people.

MARION: I suppose she was broken-hearted when she heard?

MRS. WHITTAKER: She was splendid; she wrote me the sweetest letter—saying that John's happiness was the thing to be considered before anything else, and that she was sure it would all turn out wonderfully.

MARION: That was to comfort you.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes.

Enter HILDA. She possesses all the vivacity of a deficient sense of humour. She is nineteen, and completely commonplace.

HILDA: Here's a wire, mother—they gave it to me at the post office.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*startled*): A wire?

HILDA (*giving it to her*): They were going to send the boy with it, but I said, "Oh, no, don't do that, because I'm just going straight through the village and round."

MRS. WHITTAKER *reads it and closes her eyes.*

MARION: What is it? What's the matter? . . . John?

MRS. WHITTAKER (*nodding*): Yes. (*She gives it to her.*)

HILDA: Let me see—let me see. (*She cranes over MARION'S shoulder.*) To-day—this morning—they're arriving this morning!

MARION (*handing the wire back*): How typical of him.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*bowing her head*): This is terrible.

MARION: When was it handed in?

HILDA (*snatching the wire from MRS. WHITTAKER*): Ten-five. They must have sent it just as they were starting.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Ring the bell, Hilda.

HILDA (*jumping up and doing so*): It's terrifically exciting.

MARION: Why on earth didn't he let you know before? He must be mad! Nothing's ready, or anything.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I've long ago given up expecting any consideration at Johnnie's hands.

MARION: Are you going to stick to your original plan about the schoolroom?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes.—Don't drum your heels, Hilda.

HILDA: I'm thrilled!

Enter FURBER.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Furber, Mr. John is arriving with his wife almost immediately. Will you see that fires are lit in the schoolroom and dressing-room?

FURBER: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. WHITTAKER: If by any chance they're late, we'll wait lunch.

FURBER: Very good, ma'am. (*He goes out.*)

MARION: Sarah! What about Sarah?

MRS. WHITTAKER: What shall we do? Put her off?

MARION: She's bound to meet her sooner or later—

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes, but we don't know yet—what she's like.

MARION: Sarah doesn't matter—it might be a good thing for her to be here—in one way.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Go and find your father, Hilda.

HILDA: Where is he?

MRS. WHITTAKER: With Preston, I think. Also tell Preston to send in some flowers at once.

HILDA: All right—lovely! I'll arrange them. (*She rushes off girlishly.*)

MRS. WHITTAKER (*putting out her hand*): Marion—I shall need your help—badly.

MARION (*patting her*): Cheer up, mother.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I feel so unequal to it all to-day—I didn't sleep a wink last night, and I woke with a racking headache.

MARION: Shall I get you some aspirin?

MRS. WHITTAKER: No; it wouldn't do me any good—the blow's fallen, you see—the blow's fallen.

MARION: Don't, mother!

MRS. WHITTAKER: I feel as though I were going mad. John—my John—married to this—this—woman! It's unthinkable.

MARION: She may be a good sort.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It's no good bolstering ourselves up—I know in my heart——(*She cries a little.*)

MARION (*embracing her dutifully*): It will all come right in the end, mother, if only you have enough faith.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Faith! All my life I've had to battle and struggle against this sort of thing. First your father—and now John—my only son. It's breaking my heart.

MARION: We must just put our trust in Divine Providence, dear. I'll have a straight talk to John. If she really is—well, quite hopeless—something must be done.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Nothing can be done—I tell you I know—she's got him, and she'll stick to him.

MARION: If she's the sort of woman we imagine, she's probably realised her mistake already.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Why should she have married him?

Except for what she can get out of him—money and position. He's been made a fool of, just as your father was made a fool of—hundreds of times. We know she's older than John—I don't suppose there was any love, as far as she was concerned; she's just twisted him round her little finger.

MARION: It's no use upsetting yourself *now*—you must pull yourself together and face it bravely.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I thought he would at least have had the decency to give me fair warning.

MARION: I expect they came over from France yesterday.

Enter HILDA and COLONEL WHITTAKER.

HILDA: I've told father the news.

COLONEL: I suppose they're motoring down.

MARION: Yes.

HILDA: It was luck me going to the post office like that, wasn't it? I nearly as anything didn't go out at all this morning—what with the rain and everything.

COLONEL: Are their rooms ready?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I've told Furber to have fires lighted.

HILDA: It's too exciting for words—wondering what she'll be like.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*bitterly*): I wish I could share your feelings.

HILDA: And it's so romantic—the old schoolroom being turned into a boudoir for John's wife.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Sitting-room, not boudoir.

HILDA: Sitting-room, then. Do you think she'll be dark or fair?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I don't know.

MARION: Do be quiet, Hilda.

HILDA: I think fair and lanky.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I see no reason to suppose anything of the sort.

HILDA: But guessing at people is such fun—Jackie Coryton and I do it lots—she's awfully good at it. What do you think she'll be like, Marion?

MARION: Stop asking absurd questions.

HILDA: I'm dying to see. I wonder if she drinks.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*sharply*): Hilda!

HILDA: Well, you never know—living abroad like that.

MARION: Can't you see mother's upset and doesn't want to be worried?

COLONEL: I fail to see the object of working yourself up into a state before you've set eyes on her.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You wouldn't see, Jim, because you don't care—you never have cared. As long as you're comfortable you don't mind if your son goes to the dogs.

COLONEL: He had to marry somebody—she's probably a very interesting woman.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I've no doubt you'll find her so.

HILDA: She may be frightfully sweet.

MRS. WHITTAKER: When you've reached my age, Hilda, you'll probably realise that the sort of women who infest French watering-places are generally far from being "frightfully sweet."

HILDA: Cannes isn't exactly a French watering-place—I mean it's better than that—I mean everyone goes there.

COLONEL: Everything's changing nowadays, anyhow.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I fail to see that that makes the slightest difference.

MARION: Father means that social barriers are not quite so strongly marked now, and perhaps, after all——

MRS. WHITTAKER: I know quite well what your father means.

HILDA: But everybody's accepted so much more—I mean nobody minds so much about people—I mean——

MRS. WHITTAKER: You don't know what you mean—you don't know anything about it.

HILDA: But, mother——

MRS. WHITTAKER: Your attitude towards the whole affair is ridiculous, Hilda, and I'm surprised at you. (*She sniffs.*)

HILDA: Oh, mother, don't cry—it will only make your eyes all red——

FURBER enters, with a tray on which there are some vases, a jug of water and some flowers.

FURBER: Preston sent these in just after breakfast, ma'am.

HILDA: These will be enough, mother. I'll arrange them.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Tell Preston not to pick any more.

FURBER: Very good, ma'am. (*He goes out.*)

HILDA pounces on the flowers with girlish enthusiasm.

HILDA: Aren't they lovely?—I expect she's used to orchids and things. These are so fresh—they'll be a gorgeous surprise.

MARION: We ought to warn Sarah—it might be a shock for her.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes—you'd better telephone.

MARION: I'll just say that we should like her to come, but if she feels that she'd rather not, we quite understand.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Don't splash that water all over the table, Hilda.

MARION: What's the number?

MRS. WHITTAKER: 60.

MARION (*at telephone*): Hullo—60, please.

HILDA (*conversationally*): I saw Mrs. Phillips coming out of Smith's.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*tidying up the papers on bureau*): Did you?

HILDA: She went over to talk to Mrs. Jenkins. Rose was peeling potatoes in the porch.

MARION: Hullo!—is that you, Sarah? It's Marion. Listen, old girl; prepare yourself for a shock. John's coming home with Larita, or whatever her name is, this morning.—Oh, I thought it would be rather. . . . I'm glad you feel like that, anyhow. We wanted to know if you'd come over to lunch just the same. . . . Yes, of course, bring him. . . . All right. Good-bye, old thing. (*She hangs up receiver.*) That's that.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Have you seen my glasses anywhere?

MARION: Aren't they on the desk?

MRS. WHITTAKER: They must have slipped down behind—

HILDA: Did Sarah seem upset?

MARION: She laughed.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*shocked*): Laughed!

MARION: I think she's pretending—even to herself—that she doesn't mind.

MRS. WHITTAKER: If only everything had been different—it might have been Sarah he was bringing home.

HILDA: It wouldn't have been half so exciting.

MARION: I wish to Heaven it were. She's a damned good sort, that girl.

HILDA: What's the man's name who's coming over with her?

MARION: Charles Burleigh.

HILDA: I'm dying for lunch—it's going to be too thrilling for words.

MARION (*finding glasses*): Here are your blinkers, mother.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*forcing a wan smile at MARION's ebullient phraseology*): Thank you, Marion.

COLONEL: I wonder how John's looking.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*jumping*): What a fright you gave me, Jim. I'd forgotten you were here.

COLONEL: The return of the Prodigal is always such a momentous occasion, isn't it?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I wish you wouldn't talk like that—it's not amusing.

COLONEL: I'm sorry. I thought perhaps a little light irony might alleviate the prevailing gloom.

MRS. WHITTAKER: If you think constant reminders of your callousness over the whole affair—

COLONEL: I'm not callous, Mabel; I'm just waiting with a more or less open mind.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*bitingly*): Open mind!

HILDA: There—those look sweet, don't they? I'll take them up.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Take the tray into the kitchen first.

HILDA: All right. (*She rushes off with the tray.*)

MARION: What's the time?

COLONEL: A quarter past twelve—if I may be so bold.

MARION: They might be here at any minute now.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm going upstairs to look at the school room. Tell Hilda to bring that other vase—I'll take these. (*She goes upstairs.*)

COLONEL (*lighting his pipe*): I'm glad your mother's getting cross. I prefer irritability to hysteria.

MARION: I don't think you're being very decent to mother, father.

COLONEL: You know, Marion, you're the only thoroughly Christian woman I've ever known who has retained her school-girl phraseology.

Re-enter HILDA, breathlessly.

HILDA: Where's mother?

MARION: She's gone up to the schoolroom with the flowers. Will you take that other vase up?

HILDA: All right. Don't you feel *terrifically* excited, father?

COLONEL: Terrifically.

HILDA runs joyously upstairs with the vase.

MARION: Hilda's irrepressible.

COLONEL: How is Edgar?

MARION: He's all right. Why do you ask—suddenly like that?

COLONEL: I have such a friendly feeling for him since you broke off your engagement.

MARION: Do you imagine I don't see when you're sarcastic and bitter, father? It's been growing lately. You're always saying unkind things.

COLONEL: Am I?

MARION: You must be very unhappy.

COLONEL: Perhaps that accounts for it.

MARION: Then you are?

COLONEL: Do you want to have a straight talk to me, Marion?

MARION: I suppose you despise me for trying to help other people?

COLONEL: You and your mother are always trying to help lame dogs over stiles—even if they're not lame and don't want to go.

MARION: You don't appreciate mother.

COLONEL: I appreciate you both enormously.

MARION: Mother's played fair all her life, anyhow.

COLONEL: And I haven't. I quite see that.

MARION: I'm glad you admit it.

COLONEL: I'm surprised that you're glad—it generally annoys people to be agreed with.

MARION: Don't you ever think of other things, father?

COLONEL: What sort of other things?

MARION: You know quite well what I mean.

COLONEL: Don't try to save my soul, Marion. I can defend myself.

MARION: I don't mind your taunts a bit.

COLONEL: Good!

MARION: But mother does.

COLONEL: My dear girl, your mother stood by me through my various lapses from grace with splendid fortitude.

MARION: You realise that?

COLONEL: I realise the fact but distrust the motive.

MARION: What motives could she possibly have had other than loyalty and affection?

COLONEL: I don't believe you know.

MARION: I certainly don't.

COLONEL: Well, I won't disillusion you.

MARION: Father——

COLONEL (*politely*): Yes?

MARION: She needs your help and support now—badly.

COLONEL: Why?

MARION: You can seriously stand there and ask why?

COLONEL: She has built up in her mind a black-hearted monster of a woman who has enslaved her babe, and she expects me to combine in a superhuman effort to oust her.

MARION: Nothing of the sort, father.

COLONEL: As I said before, I'm waiting with an open mind—and whatever John's wife is or has been, I shall do my utmost to make her happy and comfortable here.

Re-enter MRS. WHITTAKER and HILDA.

HILDA: The car's coming up the drive—I saw it from the landing window.

MARION: Now for it!

MRS. WHITTAKER (*appealingly*): Jim.

COLONEL (*amiably*): Yes, dear?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Nothing—it doesn't matter.

HILDA: Oh, I wonder what she'll be like—I wonder——

COLONEL: We shall soon see.

They wait in silence. Then JOHN bursts in. He is young, good-looking, with great charm; his eagerness is perhaps a shade overdone.

JOHN: Mother! (*He kisses her.*)

MRS. WHITTAKER: But, John, where——

JOHN: She's still in the car—powdering her nose. She said she wanted me to get the first joys of reunion over. Father! (*He shakes hands with the COLONEL.*)

COLONEL: I'm glad you're back, John.

JOHN: I do so hope you'll like her. (*He kisses MARION and HILDA.*)

HILDA: I know I shall.

JOHN: I feel terrified. It will be so wonderful if you do like her, and so awful if you don't.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It's a little late to think of that now.

JOHN (*his face falling*): Mother!

LARITA comes in. She is tall, exquisitely made-up and very beautiful—above everything, she is perfectly calm. Her clothes, because of their simplicity, are obviously violently expensive; she wears a perfect rope of pearls and a small close travelling-hat. She speaks with the faintest possible foreign accent.

MRS. WHITTAKER: How-do-you-do.

LARITA (*taking both her hands*): How-do-you-do seems so hopelessly inadequate, doesn't it, at a moment like this? But perhaps it's good to use it as a refuge for our real feelings.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*coldly*): Did you have a nice crossing yesterday?

LARITA (*sensing her attitude and smiling emptily*): Perfectly horrible.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm so sorry. This is my eldest daughter, Marion,—and Hilda. No doubt you've heard John speak of them.

LARITA (*shaking hands with MARION*): But of course I have—hundreds of times. (*She kisses HILDA.*) You're like Johnnie, you know.

The family wince at the diminutive.

MRS. WHITTAKER: And this is my husband.

LARITA (*shaking hands with the COLONEL*): You look dazed—I suppose I'm very unlike what you expected—or perhaps not?

COLONEL: I'm delighted to welcome you home.

LARITA (*gratefully*): Oh, thank you.

HILDA (*excitedly*): You're not a bit like what *I* expected.

LARITA: I'm very much older, probably. (*She looks at MRS. WHITTAKER.*) I'm awfully sorry about that.

JOHN: Don't be silly, Lari.

LARITA: There *have* been a good many happy marriages even though—

JOHN: It doesn't matter how many there have or haven't been, as long as ours is.

LARITA: That's right, Johnnie darling.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You must be tired after your journey. Perhaps you'd like to go upstairs.

HILDA (*eagerly*): We've turned the old schoolroom into a boudoir for you.

LARITA: How divine! It will be full of memories of Johnnie as a grubby little boy.

COLONEL: I'm sure you'd rather smoke one cigarette and get to know us all a little better first. (*He offers her his case.*)

LARITA (*smiling*): You're right—I should. Do you mind if I smoke one of my own? I have a special kind. Try one. (*She produces a beautiful case.*)

COLONEL (*taking one*): Thanks.

LARITA (*looking round*): Would anyone else like one?

MRS. WHITTAKER, No, thank you.

LARITA (*sitting down*): You know, it's such a relief

being here at last. I've been wondering so frightfully what it was going to be like—

The COLONEL lights her cigarette.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm so sorry it's such bad weather.

LARITA: The house looked fascinating from outside—I'm longing to go all over it.

JOHN: I'll take you after lunch.

LARITA: I want Mrs. Whittaker to show it to me.

JOHN: Oh, Lari darling, not Mrs. Whittaker. It's mother now.

LARITA: Not quite yet, Johnnie—I don't think.

MARION: Did you get down without any mishaps?

LARITA: Yes, it was a perfect run.

HILDA: Have you ever been in England before?

LARITA: Oh, yes, several times. I used to come here a lot with my first husband.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Your first husband?

LARITA: Yes.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*stiffening*): I never realised you had been married before. John told us so little.

LARITA: That was awfully tiresome of you, Johnnie.

JOHN: He was a perfect brute to her, mother.

MRS. WHITTAKER: How dreadful! It must have been almost a relief when he died.

LARITA: He didn't die—he divorced me.

MARION (*horror-struck*): Divorced you.

LARITA: Yes, I ran away. I was very young and silly—I should have waited, shouldn't I? and borne it stoically. It would have been braver.

JOHN: I don't see that at all. He was an absolute devil.

HILDA: I think it's the most thrilling thing I've ever heard!

LARITA: It does sound picturesque now.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I suppose you went back to your parents?

LARITA: No—I couldn't go as far as that. They were both dead.

COLONEL (*kindly*): It's awfully nice of you to tell us this.

LARITA: Johnnie ought to have explained it all, really—it would have cleared the way.

JOHN: You can't write things like that in letters.

MRS. WHITTAKER: No, I suppose not.

LARITA (*to Mrs. Whittaker*): You must have been very anxious and surprised and worried. We should have come home at once, only I stupidly got ill—pleurisy, you know. I've had it before—perfectly infuriating.

MARION: Beastly thing, pleurisy.

LARITA: But Johnnie was absolutely wonderful to me, and here we are at last. Can your butler speak French?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I beg your pardon?

LARITA: I say, can your butler speak French? You see, my maid—— Do go and rescue Louise, Johnnie; she's probably having a bad time.

JOHN: All right. Take Lari up, mother. (*He goes off.*)

HILDA: No, let me—do let me.

LARITA: I should love you to.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I hope you'll find everything quite comfortable.

LARITA: I'm sure I shall. Come along, Hilda. (*She takes her hand.*)

HILDA: I've put some flowers up there, but the rooms

aren't very warm yet, I'm afraid. You see, the fires have only just been lighted.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I think perhaps I'd better come.

LARITA: No, please don't trouble. Hilda will look after me perfectly all right—won't you, Hilda?

HILDA (*eagerly*): Rather. Do let me, mother.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Very well. Lunch will be ready quite soon.

LARITA (*as she goes upstairs with HILDA*): Lovely! I'm ravenous. I was too excited to eat any breakfast.

They go off. There is silence for a moment.

MARION: She seems a good sort—I like her.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Do you, Marion?

MARION: Don't you?

MRS. WHITTAKER: She's exactly what I expected—in every detail. (*She turns away.*)

COLONEL: Surely not in *every* detail? She wasn't drunk——

MRS. WHITTAKER: Jim, please!

MARION: Father—how can you say things like that?

COLONEL: Larita's an extraordinarily pretty name.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Excellent for musical comedy. (*She turns her back and goes over to the window.*)

JOHN enters, and sees that LARITA has gone.

JOHN (*eagerly*): Well?

COLONEL: I congratulate you, John.

JOHN (*shaking his hand violently*): Oh, father, thank you—I am glad!

MARION: I hope you managed the French maid all right?

JOHN: Oh, yes. I'm used to her. Mother—— (*He goes to her.*)

MRS. WHITTAKER (*turning and kissing him without warmth*): Well, John, I hope you'll be very happy.

JOHN: I am, mother—frightfully.

MRS. WHITTAKER: She's very beautiful.

JOHN: Do you think so, honestly?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes, of course.

JOHN: And you've no idea what a darling she is. All the time she was ill she was splendid—so brave and everything.

MARION: Is she a Catholic?

JOHN (*nonplussed*): I say—I'm afraid I don't know. You see, we weren't married in church.

MARION: Oh!

JOHN (*pulling himself together*): What a fool I am! She's a Catholic, of course; I remember now.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Sarah's coming over to lunch.

JOHN: Is she? How ripping. I've been longing to see her again. I want her to meet Lari, too.

MRS. WHITTAKER: The Hursts have been entertaining a lot this winter. Sarah's been very much in demand. They gave a most successful dance in London.

JOHN: Good old Sarah!

MRS. WHITTAKER: If you've got any aspirin in your room, Marion dear, I should like some. My headache's rather bad.

MARION: All right. Will you come up, or shall I fetch it?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'll come up.

JOHN: I'm so sorry, mother. I suppose I ought to have let you know before that we were coming.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It doesn't matter.

JOHN: I did so want it to be a surprise.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I hope you'll see that your—Larita has everything she wants, John.

JOHN: Rather! Thanks, mother,—of course I will.

MRS. WHITTAKER: That's right. (*She goes upstairs with MARION.*)

JOHN: I suppose mother's upset, isn't she?

COLONEL: A little, I think.

JOHN: You think she'll get over it, though, don't you?

COLONEL: I expect so. Don't worry.

JOHN: It must have been an awful shock for her—for you both.

COLONEL: My dear boy, this sort of thing's always a shock—it's unavoidable.

JOHN: You like Lari, though, don't you, father?

COLONEL: She seems charming.

JOHN: Oh, she is—she's more than that—she's wonderful.

COLONEL: She's older than I thought.

JOHN: Yes, but that doesn't matter really, does it?—I mean if people really care for one another.

COLONEL: I don't know. It might—later on.

JOHN (*haltingly*): You mean—children?

COLONEL: Not altogether.

JOHN: I don't suppose we shall have any children.

COLONEL: No—I don't suppose you will.

JOHN: But Marion's married, and Hilda will be soon.

COLONEL (*gently*): That's not quite the same thing, is it?

JOHN: Are you cut up about it?

COLONEL: What's the use of being cut up, John? When a thing's done, you've got to stand by it.

JOHN: Father—I do love her terribly; she's my life's happiness.

COLONEL: That's all right, then. Run up and look after her—she's probably feeling a little shattered.

JOHN: All right. Thanks, father. (*He goes upstairs, two at a time.*)

The COLONEL sighs, takes "The Times" and goes off into the library.

FURBER enters, followed by SARAH HURST and CHARLES BURLEIGH. SARAH is boyish and modern and attractive. CHARLES BURLEIGH is a pleasant-looking man somewhere between thirty and forty.

SARAH: Where's everybody, Furber?

FURBER: I don't know, miss. Mr. and Mrs. John have just arrived. They're probably all upstairs, I'll tell them you're here.

SARAH: No, don't do that—we'll wait.

FURBER: Very good, miss.

SARAH: How's your neuritis, Furber?

FURBER: It's been rather bad, miss.

SARAH: I meant to bring you over that stuff, but I forgot. I'll send it to-night.

FURBER: Thank you very much, miss. (*He goes out.*)

CHARLES: I suppose this is a slightly momentous day in the lives of the Whittakers.

SARAH: Very momentous.

CHARLES: Is your heart wrung with emotion?

SARAH (*lightly*): Don't be a beast, Charles.

CHARLES: I think it's spirited of you to come.

SARAH: I want to see her.

CHARLES: I feel secretly embarrassed—as though I oughtn't to be here at all.

SARAH: Nonsense—you're moral backing for me.

CHARLES: Thank you, Sarah—it's an attractive rôle.

SARAH: I wasn't really officially engaged to John—it was just a sort of understood thing.

CHARLES: I see.

SARAH: And I've had a nice three months to get over being upset about it.

CHARLES: And you have?

SARAH: Entirely.

CHARLES: Well, that's a comfort, isn't it?

SARAH: A great comfort.

CHARLES: Shall we be discovered intimately looking over the *Tatler* together?

SARAH: No—that would be overdoing it.

CHARLES: Perhaps it would.

SARAH: I'm extremely hungry.

CHARLES: That's a healthy sign.

SARAH: Whatever she's like, you must be awfully nice, and pay a lot of attention to her.

CHARLES: Certainly.

SARAH: I think I'm going to get the giggles.

CHARLES: For Heaven's sake, don't.

SARAH: It is funny, you know.

CHARLES (*gloomily*): Excruciatingly.

SARAH: You'll realise just *how* funny it is when you see Mrs. Whittaker.

CHARLES: I shall try to control myself.

SARAH: And Marion.—Oh, dear Marion!

CHARLES: Shut up, Sarah—you're unnerving me.

SARAH: I can't help it. (*She giggles hopelessly.*)

CHARLES: Pull yourself together. Someone's coming.

HILDA *rushes downstairs.*

HILDA: Sarah!

SARAH: Hullo!

HILDA (*breathlessly*): Oh, Sarah, she's too beautiful for words!

SARAH: No, really.

HILDA: And the most heavenly clothes.

SARAH: This is Mr. Burleigh—Hilda Whittaker.

HILDA (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do? We're all fearfully excited, you know—John's new wife's just arrived.

CHARLES: Yes; Sarah told me.

HILDA: She's got a scream of a French maid—I nearly died!

SARAH: How's Mrs. Whittaker?

HILDA: She's got a headache. John's talking to her in her room. I've got to dash down to the garage to give a message to the chauffeur—he's a new man. Come with me. (*She proceeds to drag her hand.*)

SARAH: I can't leave poor Charles all alone.

HILDA (*persistently*): You must—it's only for a minute. I've got such lots to tell you.

SARAH: All right. Do you mind, Charles?

CHARLES: Very much.

HILDA: She shan't be long—honestly. I haven't seen Sarah for ages, and I shan't get another opportunity of talking to her.

SARAH (*laughing*): Charles is such a timid man, it'll do him good. Come on.

CHARLES: Here, I say—Sarah——

SARAH: We shan't be *very* long! (*She goes off with HILDA.*)

CHARLES (*alone*): Oh, God! (*He wanders about the hall, then finally sits down on the sofa with the "Tatler."*)

LARITA comes downstairs, having taken off her hat and generally reinstated herself.

CHARLES rises to his feet.

LARITA: Oh, how-do-you-do.

CHARLES (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do.

LARITA: Are you lunching here?

CHARLES: Yes; I came over with Sarah Hurst. I'm staying with them—a few miles away.

LARITA: I've heard Johnnie speak of them.

CHARLES: You've only just arrived, haven't you?

LARITA: Yes, this morning. We came over from Paris yesterday.

There is a slight pause.

CHARLES: It's always rather an anti-climax, isn't it?—arriving anywhere.

LARITA: Why? Do I look bored?

CHARLES: Not at all.

LARITA: I know what you mean, though; one feels sort of dead.

CHARLES: It's only temporary.

LARITA: Oh, yes—I hope so.

CHARLES: Do you know if anyone else is lunching?

LARITA: Only you and Miss Hurst, I believe—outside of the family.

CHARLES: Good!

LARITA: Why do you say "Good" so emphatically?

CHARLES: It must be bad enough for you to have to meet a bunch of brand-new relations—let alone total strangers. I feel quite an interloper.

LARITA: Please don't. I don't mind meeting new people a bit—on the contrary, it's rather a comfort, in a way—it eases things a little.

CHARLES (*offering case*): Will you smoke?

LARITA: I'll smoke one of my own, if you don't mind. I get a bad throat if I change. I smoke far too much. (*She takes a cigarette out of her case.*)

CHARLES (*lighting hers and his own*): That's an enchanting case.

LARITA: It is a darling.

CHARLES: Cartier?

LARITA: No; Locloche. I've had it for years.

CHARLES: Were you in Paris long?

LARITA: Only a week. I had to get some new clothes and fortify myself.

CHARLES: Naturally.

LARITA: Where is everybody?

CHARLES: I don't know.

LARITA: They're discussing their first impressions of me, I expect. It must be horrid for them.

CHARLES: I don't see why.

LARITA (*smiling*): You do—perfectly well.

CHARLES: I suppose it's always rather a shock for people when their sons marry.

LARITA: Do you know Johnnie?

CHARLES: No.

LARITA: He's an angel.

CHARLES: I don't know any of them—I'm more of a stranger than you.

LARITA: I'm so glad. It gives us a sort of bond in common, doesn't it?

CHARLES: Yes.

LARITA: Tell me about Sarah Hurst.

CHARLES: How shall I begin?

LARITA: Don't look apprehensive. I know about her and Johnnie—when they were young, and everything.

CHARLES: She's a charming girl—unaffected.

LARITA: Thank God for that.

CHARLES: Not very emotional—and quite a sense of humour.

LARITA: I'm looking forward to seeing her.

CHARLES: Are you?

LARITA: No.

CHARLES (*laughing outright*): I quite understand.

LARITA: I know you do. Is she pretty?

CHARLES: Not exactly. More attractive than pretty.

LARITA: Dark or fair?

CHARLES: Fairish. She's rather like a young edition of a very old friend of mine. She lives in Paris. I wonder if you've met her.

LARITA: Who?

CHARLES: Cécile de Uriaac.

LARITA (*delighted*): Cécile! Do you know Cécile?

CHARLES: I've known her for years.

LARITA: How extraordinary! What's your name?

CHARLES: Charles Burleigh.

LARITA: Of course! She has shown me snapshots of you. I knew I recognised your face, somehow. She is such fun, isn't she?

CHARLES: I'm devoted to her.

LARITA: And Freddy!

CHARLES: Oh, Freddy!

They both laugh.

LARITA: That's all over now.

CHARLES: No?—Is it?

LARITA: Yes—last August, in Venice—or rather the Lido, to be accurate.

CHARLES: I don't wonder. That beach would kill any passion.

LARITA: You know Zushie Wincott, of course?

CHARLES: Rather! What's become of her?

LARITA: I tremble to think—judging by the way she was behaving in Cannes at Christmas.

CHARLES: With George, I suppose?

LARITA: No, not *with* George—at George.

CHARLES: Poor old Zushie! She's rather a dear, really.

LARITA: She's so utterly uncontrolled—always making scenes. I loathe scenes.

CHARLES: You first met John at Cannes, didn't you?

LARITA: Yes. He'd been Banco-ing recklessly and losing everything. I was well up on the day, so I lent him some plaques, and it changed his luck.

CHARLES: In more ways than one.

LARITA: I wonder.

CHARLES: I'm sure of it.

LARITA: It's sweet of you to say so. I'm dreadfully fond of him you know.

CHARLES: I can see that.

LARITA: Can you? How?

CHARLES: By the way you talk of him.

LARITA: He's awfully young and—well, almost ingenuous sometimes. I think that must have been what attracted me to him at first—it was refreshing.

CHARLES (*nodding*): Yes.

LARITA: And then we kept on meeting, you know. Cannes is a small place—and I was so tired of everybody.

CHARLES: People run dreadfully in grooves.

LARITA: Always the same faces—and the same expressions and the same motives.

CHARLES: Motives?

LARITA: You know what I mean.

CHARLES: Yes.

LARITA: It's amusing and fun for a little while, and then one begins to realise that perhaps—after all—it's a trifle cheap.

CHARLES: It's certainly astonishing how quickly one becomes disillusioned over everything.

LARITA: Everything?

CHARLES: Well, practically everything.

LARITA (*with a sigh*): Yes, that's true.

CHARLES: Are you going to live here indefinitely?

LARITA (*slowly*): I don't know. Through the summer, anyhow.

CHARLES: I hope you'll be very happy.

LARITA: Thank you. (*She looks out of the window.*) I wish it wasn't raining.

CHARLES: There's a ridiculous picture of Harry Leftwich in the *Tatler*, walking along the terrace at Monte Carlo—with that dark woman who went to share a studio with Maud Callish in the Rue Bonaparte.

LARITA: Oh, Suzanne—do let me see—Suzanne Fellini—

She comes over to the sofa, and they both bend over the "Tatler."

CHARLES (*finding it*): There.

LARITA: Yes, that's Suzanne—doesn't she look fierce? It's so absurd when people are photographed with their legs sticking straight out in front of them like that.

CHARLES (*laughing*): Poor dears!

LARITA: Oh, do look at her hat.

They both laugh a good deal.

MRS. WHITTAKER comes downstairs, followed by

JOHN and MARION. Mrs. WHITTAKER's face freezes slightly. CHARLES gets up.

MRS. WHITTAKER: How-do-you-do. You are Mr. Burleigh?

CHARLES (*calmly*): Yes, your youngest daughter came and spirited Sarah away. I don't know where they've gone.

JOHN (*going to LARITA*): I couldn't think where you were, Larita.

LARITA: I thought everyone was down here.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*to LARITA*): I suppose you and Mr. Burleigh have introduced yourselves?

LARITA: Oh, yes; we've discovered lots of mutual friends.

MRS. WHITTAKER: How nice. (*To CHARLES*) This is my eldest daughter.

CHARLES (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do.

MRS. WHITTAKER: And my son.

JOHN: How are you? (*He also shakes hands.*)

HILDA and SARAH *re-enter*.

SARAH (*kissing MRS. WHITTAKER*): Hilda dragged me off to see a perfectly strange chauffeur. Have you all met Charles?

CHARLES: Yes, you're too late—it's all over.

SARAH: Hallo, John—I'm terribly pleased to see you.

JOHN (*taking her hand*): Sarah, I want you to meet my wife, Larita. I do hope you'll be friends.

LARITA (*shaking hands*): I hope so, too.

SARAH: Of course we shall. You're utterly different from what I imagined.

LARITA (*smiling*): Am I really?

SARAH (*laughing*): Yes—I pictured you fair and fluffy.

LARITA: How absurd!

FURBER *enters*.

FURBER: Lunch is served.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Let's all go in, then. Tell the Colonel, Furber.

FURBER: Yes, ma'am.

The COLONEL *enters*.

HILDA: Come on, father; lunch is ready.

SARAH *takes LARITA's arm and walks into the dining-room with her. LARITA throws a look over her shoulder at CHARLES, who smiles. Everyone goes in talking. FURBER waits, and then follows them, closing the folding doors after him.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: Three months have passed since Act I. It is a warm summer day—warm for England, anyhow—which means that unless you hurl yourself about on tennis-courts or indulge in some sort of strenuous exercise all the time, you get extremely cold. The sun-awning has been let down over the verandah.

LARITA is lying on the sofa, reading "Sodom and Gomorrah," by Marcel Proust. Outside in the garden tennis noises can be heard, occasional shouts and laughter. LARITA throws her cigarette-end out on to the verandah, but it goes on the carpet, so she has to get up and throw it again, which she does with a slight display of temper. She lights herself another and lies down again; then discovers that Marcel Proust has eluded her and is reclining carelessly on the bureau. With an expression of resigned fury she gets up again and fetches it. When she is once more ensconced on the sofa

MRS. WHITTAKER enters.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Why don't you go and watch the tennis, Larita?

LARITA: The excitement's so intense, my nerves won't stand it.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*at window*): I wish you wouldn't throw cigarette-ends on to the verandah; it looks so

untidy. (*She picks it up and throws it into the garden.*)

LARITA: I'm sorry.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Fancy lying indoors on a lovely day like this.

LARITA: It's very chilly outside.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Not in the sun.

LARITA: I get a headache if I sit in the sun.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I wonder you don't play tennis with the others.

LARITA: I'm so awfully bad that it annoys everybody.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You'd soon improve if you practised.

LARITA: I don't know that the end would altogether justify the means.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Have you seen Marion?

LARITA: Not since lunch.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I wonder where she is.

LARITA: Upstairs, I think.

MRS. WHITTAKER: She had a letter from Edgar this morning.

LARITA: Did she?

MRS. WHITTAKER: He's coming home.

LARITA: How lovely.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*shooting a suspicious glance at her*): You've never met him?

LARITA: Never. I meant it was lovely for Marion that he was coming home—not for me.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Where's John?

LARITA: He went out, I think.

MRS. WHITTAKER: How irritating! I wanted to talk to him particularly.

LARITA: Perhaps he didn't know.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I think we shall have to get rid of Preston.

LARITA: What a pity? He seems such a nice man.

MRS. WHITTAKER: He's been neglecting the garden disgracefully.

LARITA: It must be awfully difficult to be a gardener.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm worried to death about to-night.

LARITA: I'm so sorry. Why?

MRS. WHITTAKER: If it's wet we can't have the buffet on the verandah.

LARITA: Perhaps it will be fine.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Only half the things I ordered have arrived from Fortnum's.

LARITA: Can I do anything?

MRS. WHITTAKER: No, thank you, Larita. I'm quite used to all responsibilities of this sort falling on to my shoulders. The children are always utterly inconsiderate. Thank Heaven, I have a talent for organisation. (*She goes out with a martyred expression.*)

LARITA, with a sigh, once more plunges into her book.

Enter MARION, down stairs.

MARION: Hallo! old thing. Why aren't you watching the tennis?

LARITA: I'm afraid of discouraging them.

MARION: Have you seen mother?

LARITA: Yes, she's just gone into the garden.

MARION: I think she's getting a bit fussed about to-night.

LARITA: She has a talent for organisation.

MARION: Things are certain to turn out all right, if you don't worry about 'em.

LARITA: That must be a very comforting philosophy.

MARION: You seem a bit snappy, old girl. Has anything upset you?

LARITA (*putting down her book*): I'm sorry—I didn't mean to be snappy. What shall we talk about?

MARION: I'm afraid I haven't time to talk now—too many things to see to. You know, only half the stuff's arrived from Fortnum's.

LARITA: Why not telephone them?

MARION: I have.

LARITA: Are they sending the rest down?

MARION: Yes.

LARITA: Well, that's all right, then, isn't it?

MARION: Have you seen father?

LARITA: He went out, I think.

MARION: Typical of him to shelve everything on to mother and me.

LARITA: Perhaps he'll come back soon bristling with ideas.

MARION: I think mother's wrong about having the buffet on the verandah—it's sure to rain. (*She goes out.*)

LARITA *lies back and closes her eyes. She is about to read again when JOHN rushes in from the garden, very hot.*

JOHN: Hullo! Why don't you come and watch the tennis?

LARITA: There seems to be a conspiracy among everybody to lead me on to that very exposed tennis-court.

JOHN: Well, you needn't come if you don't want to. (*He begins to go upstairs.*)

LARITA: Where are you going?

JOHN: To get Sarah's sweater—she left it in the school-room before lunch.

LARITA: You might bring down my fur coat.

JOHN: Fur coat! What on earth for?

LARITA: I'm cold.

JOHN: I don't wonder—lying about indoors all day.

LARITA: Don't be intolerant, darling.

JOHN goes off.

LARITA bites her lip and looks extremely unhappy.

After a moment JOHN returns, with SARAH's sweater over one arm and LARITA's coat over the other.

JOHN: Here you are. (He gives it to her.)

LARITA: Thank you, Johnnie. (She puts it on.)

JOHN: You wouldn't be cold if you took some exercise.

LARITA: Come for a walk with me.

JOHN (irritably): How can I? We're in the middle of a sett.

JOHN goes out.

LARITA (calling): Johnnie!

JOHN (reappearing): What is it?

LARITA (hopelessly): Nothing. It doesn't matter.

JOHN goes out.

LARITA sits on the sofa, her fur coat round her and her chin cupped in her hands; her eyes fill with tears, so she takes a handkerchief from her bag and blows her nose.

COLONEL WHITTAKER enters. He regards her thoughtfully for a moment.

COLONEL: Hullo! What's the matter?

LARITA (jumping): Oh—I never heard you.

COLONEL: You seem plunged in gloom.

LARITA (lightly): It's only a mood.

COLONEL: Cheer up.

LARITA: You won't ask me why I'm not watching the tennis, will you?

COLONEL: No, my dear. Nor will I enquire why you are wearing your fur coat—the reasons are obvious: you are bored and cold.

LARITA: Exactly.

COLONEL: Shall we play bázique?

LARITA (*shuddering*): No, thank you.

COLONEL: Do. It's such a thrilling game.

LARITA: I don't remember how—

COLONEL: Neither do I—that will give it an added piquancy. (*He goes to the bottom drawer of the bureau and produces a bázique set.*)

LARITA (*laughing*): You really are absurd.

COLONEL: Stay where you are, and I'll bring up this dear little table. (*He does so.*)

LARITA: It is sweet, isn't it?

COLONEL (*sitting down opposite her*): I forget how to deal. It's either nine or thirteen.

LARITA: I believe it's eleven.

COLONEL (*dealing her two cards and himself two*): Turn them up.

LARITA (*turning them up*): Card.

COLONEL (*turning his up*): Nine.

LARITA: I'm more used to this sort of bázique.

He deals out four more cards. (turning up eight)
Eight.

COLONEL (*passing her the pack*): There now.

LARITA (*dealing*): I feel my nostrils quivering like a war-horse.

COLONEL: Card, please.

LARITA (*turning up her cards*): Useless.

COLONEL: Are you preparing to have a run?

LARITA: Certainly. (*She deals again.*)

COLONEL (*turning up*): Eight.

LARITA (*also turning up*): I'm so sorry—nine!

COLONEL: Devil.

LARITA (*dealing again*): Faites vos jeux.

COLONEL (*turning up*). Carte.

LARITA: Nine!

COLONEL: Lucky at cards, unlucky——

LARITA: Don't say that to me—it's a malicious treason.

(*She deals again.*)

COLONEL: Carte.

LARITA (*giving him one and herself one*): Now then.

COLONEL: Damn!

LARITA: Nine!

COLONEL: There's something underhand about this.

LARITA: I shall have you turned out of the Casino if you accuse me of cheating.

COLONEL: One more go, please.

LARITA (*dealing*): There!

COLONEL: Eight.

LARITA (*laughing*): My poor friend! Nine.

COLONEL (*hurling the pack on the floor*): Disgusting.

LARITA: Don't be a cad!

They both go down on to the floor and proceed to pick up the cards.

COLONEL: I should like to get a shoe and a couple of seedy croupiers, and start a gambling-hell in this village.

LARITA: It would be grand.

MRS. WHITTAKER enters.

MRS. WHITTAKER: What on earth are you doing?

COLONEL: Gambling.

LARITA: I'm afraid the Colonel forgot he was an English gentleman, and lost his temper.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Have you been down to the village inn?

COLONEL: Yes.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Well, all I can say is, you might have told me you were going—you could have seen Harry about fixing the Japanese lanterns.

COLONEL: I did see Harry.

MRS. WHITTAKER: What did he say?

COLONEL: He's coming up at half-past five.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Well, I think you might have let me know. (*Going. She goes upstairs.*)

COLONEL: It is *such* fun giving a dance.

LARITA: You must control your excitement.

COLONEL: There, that's all, I think. (*He rises.*)

LARITA: There's an angry Queen of Hearts secreting herself under the sofa. (*She retrieves it and rises.*) I feel better now, thank you.

COLONEL: Splendid.

LARITA: Who's coming to-night?

COLONEL: The county. You'll see dresses that will make your mouth water.

LARITA: I must be careful—it will be my social début.

COLONEL: What will you wear?

LARITA: Something non-committal and austere.

COLONEL: Not black?

LARITA: No—that would clash with the Dowager's.

COLONEL: White?

LARITA: Too *ingénue*.

COLONEL: There's always lavender.

LARITA: Yes—much more appropriate.

COLONEL: Your friend Charles Burleigh's coming.

LARITA: Yes, I know—I'm awfully glad. He's a nice man.

COLONEL: I tremble for you sometimes.

LARITA: Why?

COLONEL: This life must be so deadly for you.

LARITA: Don't say that.

COLONEL: It is though—isn't it?

LARITA: Now and then—perhaps.

COLONEL: Do you regret everything?

LARITA: What's the good? I must get used to it.

COLONEL: I try my best, with *bézique* and small-talk, to make things brighter for you.

LARITA: I know you do. You've been a darling all along.

COLONEL: Do you think you'd be happier if you and John settled down in London?

LARITA: I don't know. I feel frightened of making any definite plans. Everything depends on John.

COLONEL: I'll talk to him.

LARITA: No, please don't; let him decide on his own whatever he wants to do.

COLONEL: He must see you're being bored stiff.

LARITA: I'm not—all the time. I just get moods—

COLONEL (*patting her hand*): I understand.

LARITA: I wouldn't mind how bored and out of place I was—if only—

COLONEL (*gently*): If only what?

LARITA: If only John were with me a little more.

COLONEL: He's inconsiderate—but he doesn't mean to be.

LARITA: He's getting a bit sick of me, I'm afraid.

COLONEL: What nonsense!

LARITA: I ought to be so much more adaptable—but it's difficult. I've tried terribly hard during the three months I've been here, but I've only succeeded in making everyone more or less used to me. I've established a sort of truce, that's all.

COLONEL: That in itself is an achievement. We're an insular, hidebound set.

LARITA: Nobody really likes me—except you.

COLONEL: Sarah does.

LARITA: Yes, I'd forgotten Sarah. It's queer of her, isn't it?

COLONEL: She places a high value on intelligence where no one else recognises it.

LARITA: Marion is persistently pleasant because she feels she owes it to her religious views.

COLONEL: Marion—though I say it as shouldn't—is a fool.

LARITA: I've got an unworthy passion for popularity—it hurts my vanity not to be an unqualified success.

COLONEL: Rubbish!—it's nothing to do with your vanity.

LARITA: Please—I want it to be my vanity that's hurt, and nothing else.

COLONEL: You mustn't expect results too soon, you know. Three months is a very short time.

LARITA (*suddenly, with vehemence*): Oh, what's the use of going on about it?—throwing dust and trying to obscure

the truth. You know and I know—it's all a rotten failure!
(She goes upstairs.)

The COLONEL shrugs his shoulders and lights a cigarette. MARION comes in from the garden.

MARION: I think if we had the lanterns just along the verandah and across to the cedar it would be all right, don't you?

COLONEL: Quite. There aren't enough to go further, anyhow.

MARION: Mother thought there ought to be a few round the summer-house.

COLONEL: Fairy lamps would be much better there, and there are more of them.

MARION: I wish you'd tell her what you think. (She sees LARITA's book and picks it up.) Hullo! what's this? Sodom and Gomorrah. Why does Lari read such silly muck? (She flings it down again.)

COLONEL (gently): Don't be sweeping, Marion. Marcel Proust happens to be one of the few really brilliant novelists in the world.

MARION: Pity he chooses such piffling subjects, then.

COLONEL: Have you ever read him?

MARION: No—but all French writers are the same—sex—sex—sex. People think too much of all that sort of tosh nowadays, anyhow. After all, there are other things in life.

COLONEL: You mean higher things, don't you, Marion? —much higher?

MARION: I certainly do—and I'm not afraid to admit it.

COLONEL: You mustn't be truculent just because you've affiliated yourself with the Almighty. (He goes into the library.)

MARION snorts crossly, and MRS. WHITTAKER comes downstairs.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*obviously*): Oh, there you are, Marion.

MARION: Father's intolerable.

MRS. WHITTAKER: What's the matter?

MARION: He never loses an opportunity of jeering at me.

MRS. WHITTAKER: He's an exceedingly selfish man—he knows perfectly well how rushed and worried I am, and he never attempts to help. I found him in here, on the floor, with Larita.

MARION: On the floor?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes; they'd been playing cards, and dropped them, or something.

MARION: I wish Larita wouldn't slack about indoors all day. It isn't healthy.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*seeing "Sodom and Gomorrah"*): Whose is that book?

MARION: Hers, of course.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Well, please take it up to her room. I don't like that kind of literature left in the hall—especially when there are young people about.

MARION: You'd think she'd make some effort to adapt herself to our ways, wouldn't you? instead of—

MRS. WHITTAKER: Please don't let's discuss her, Marion; you know it upsets me—and Heaven knows I've got enough on my mind to-day.

MARION: I should like to give her a little advice about things.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Do, dear; but wait until after to-night—we don't want a scene.

MARION: I don't think she'd cut up rough if I was tactful. You see, she doesn't quite understand——

MRS. WHITTAKER: How can you expect her to?

MARION: And father's always encouraging her, and saying ridiculous things, and making her laugh.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Your father has a certain horrible streak in him that nothing will eradicate—no one's more aware of that than I. It's caused me years of suffering.

MARION: I know, mother.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Birds of a feather——

MARION (*alarmed*): But I think Larita's all right—really, mother, don't you? I mean——

MRS. WHITTAKER: My dear Marion, I flatter myself I'm a woman of the world. We have no proof of the sort of life Larita has led, and we don't want any proof—she is John's wife, and as long as he cares for her nothing can be done——

MARION: What do you mean by "nothing can be done"?

MRS. WHITTAKER: This was never anything but a mad infatuation—and mad infatuations don't last.

MARION: But, mother, he's married to her.

MRS. WHITTAKER: There is such a thing as divorce.

MARION: I don't approve of divorce, and I never have.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Neither do I—but in a case like this it's rather different.

MARION: I think she's fond of him, you know.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Time will show.

HILDA comes in from the garden; she is flushed and hot.

HILDA: Philip and I won the sett. Is there any lemonade, or anything?

MRS. WHITTAKER: You'd better go into the pantry and get some. Furber's very busy.

HILDA: Where's Larita?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I don't know.

HILDA: She was making sheep's eyes at Philip all through lunch.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You mustn't say things like that, Hilda.

HILDA: Well, she was. I nearly *died* of shame.

MARION: You'd better go and fetch the lemonade.

HILDA: You'd think she'd know how to behave at her age.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Hilda, that will do.

HILDA: I'm fed up with her. Look how she went on with Harry Emsworth. She'd better be careful, I can tell you—

Enter JOHN, SARAH and PHILIP BORDON—he is a callow, lanky youth.

JOHN: Where's the drink?

HILDA: I'm just going to fetch it.

SARAH (*sinking down*): I'm dead.

PHILIP: It's jolly hot.

JOHN: Why didn't you play, Marion?

MARION: Too busy. Anyhow, you were four.

SARAH: Give me a cigarette, John.

JOHN: I've only got stinkers.

SARAH: I'll take one of Lari's; she won't mind. (*Takes one from LARI'S case on the sofa.*)

JOHN lights it.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I wonder if two extra girls will be enough, with Furber and Ellen.

MARION: I should think so.

MRS. WHITTAKER: We can get Mrs. Pollock's married daughter, you know. They're only just down the road.

MARION: It won't be necessary.

Re-enter HILDA, with tray of drinks.

HILDA: Furber had it all ready.

JOHN: Put it on the verandah, Hilda.

PHILIP: Let me help.

HE and HILDA retire on to the verandah with the drinks.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Come into the library, Marion, and help me with the dinner list.

MARION: Father's in there.

MRS. WHITTAKER: We'll go up to my room, then. If Harris comes, don't let him go before I've seen him, John.

JOHN: All right, mother.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*as she and MARION go upstairs*): We shall have to put Lady Gibbons next to your father.

MARION: He hates her.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It can't be helped.

They go off.

SARAH: Bring me some lemonade in here, John—it's so nice and cool.

JOHN (*going out on to verandah*): I wish you were dining too.

SARAH: I've got to be at home and help mother with our party. I ought to be there now, really.

JOHN (*off*): Wouldn't you rather have ginger-beer?

SARAH: No—lemonade, please.

JOHN: Right.

After a moment he returns with lemonade for SARAH and ginger-beer for himself.

SARAH (*taking it*): Thanks.

JOHN: Pretty hot player, Philip.

SARAH: He nearly killed me.

JOHN: Keep a lot of dances for me to-night, won't you?

SARAH: Of course.

JOHN: It ought to be fun, if it keeps fine.

SARAH: Where's Lari, I wonder?

JOHN: Reading somewhere, I expect.

SARAH: She looked divine at lunch.

JOHN: It's funny you liking her. I was afraid you wouldn't.

SARAH: Why?

JOHN: Oh, I don't know—she's so utterly different.

SARAH: I expect that's the reason.

JOHN: I wish she wouldn't slack indoors so much.

SARAH: I don't see that it matters, if she wants to.

JOHN: It's all very well in the winter, but in this sort of weather—

SARAH: You mustn't be grumpy just because people don't like doing exactly the same things as you.

JOHN: I'm not grumpy.

SARAH: Yes, you are—a little.

JOHN: It's annoying, though.

SARAH: Don't let it be.

JOHN: You're such a sport, always ready for anything.

SARAH: But I haven't got Lari's beauty or charm or intelligence.

JOHN: Here, I say!

SARAH: I mean that.

JOHN: She is clever, isn't she?

SARAH: Yes, and being clever she's a little bored.

JOHN: She wouldn't be, if only she entered into things.

SARAH: Perhaps she can't enter into things. You must remember this sort of life is entirely new to her.

JOHN: Yes, I know, but—

SARAH: You're all right, because you're on your own ground. I think you ought to give a bit more.

JOHN: How do you mean?

SARAH: Do what she wants now and then, instead of only what you want.

JOHN: But I do. I took her for miles in the car yesterday —she said she needed air.

SARAH: That's right.

JOHN: So you see—

SARAH: Don't make excuses; you know what I mean.

JOHN: I don't.

SARAH: Well, I can't explain; it's something you must find out for yourself.

JOHN: I do think it's most frightfully decent of you to stand up for her.

SARAH: That wasn't my object.

JOHN: I say, you have changed lately; you never used to go on like this.

SARAH: Like what?

JOHN: Well, all serious and preachy.

SARAH (*laughing*): I'm sorry you think I'm preachy; you see, I'm growing up, and you're not.

JOHN: Oh, yes, I am.

SARAH: Well, not in the way you should, then.

JOHN: You've got ever so much nicer-looking.

SARAH: Thank you.

JOHN: Are you going to marry too?

SARAH: Certainly.

JOHN (*anxiously*): Who? Charlie?

SARAH: Good heavens, no! He's much too old.

JOHN: Oh!

SARAH (*repentantly*): I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean that exactly.

JOHN: It's all right.

SARAH: He's not my type at all; if I loved him, I wouldn't care how old he was.

JOHN: I can't imagine you married.

SARAH: What a pity! I have a vivid mental picture of it.

JOHN: Is there anybody you *are* in love with?

SARAH: Not at the moment, but I'm keeping my eyes open.

JOHN: I've often meant to ask you something, but I hadn't the courage.

SARAH: Well, don't, then.

JOHN: I must.

SARAH: Give me a cigarette first.

JOHN: Stinker?

SARAH: Yes; anything.

JOHN (*giving her one*): Here.

SARAH: Thanks. Go ahead.

JOHN: Did you think I behaved like a cad, marrying Lari like that, without letting you know?

SARAH: Of course not.

JOHN: Are you sure?

SARAH: Quite. I understood perfectly.

JOHN: It's been on my mind rather.

SARAH: You took your opportunity, and married for

love, John, and I respect you for it. If we'd married, it would have been for friendship and convenience.

JOHN: Would it?

SARAH (*firmly*): Yes—we knew one another far too well.

JOHN: Do you think that's a disadvantage?

SARAH: In married life, certainly.

JOHN: I don't.

SARAH: It would have been so dull and ordinary—no excitement at all.

JOHN: I don't want excitement.

SARAH: I do. I want thrills and glamour and passionate love-letters—all the trappings.

JOHN: I could have written you love-letters.

SARAH: Well, why didn't you?

JOHN: I don't know. I—

SARAH (*triumphantly*): The fact that you didn't proves that you couldn't—you didn't feel that way about me, ever.

JOHN: It was a different sort of feeling.

SARAH: Don't be a hypocrite, John, and try and deceive yourself.

JOHN: I did love you, all the same.

SARAH (*rising*): How touching.

JOHN: I do still.

SARAH: Shut up, John!

JOHN: You see, I'm beginning to realise I've made rather a mess of things. (*He puts his face in his hands.*)

SARAH (*furiously*): Shut up, I tell you, or I'll never speak to you again. That's behaving like a cad, if you like—an utter cad!

JOHN (*miserably*): Sarah—

SARAH: You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Haven't you got any sense of decency? Let me tell you one thing—you're not fit to wipe Lari's boots.

LARITA *appears at the top of the stairs in time to catch the last sentence.*

LARITA (*lightly; coming down*): Hallo!—what are you two squabbling about?

SARAH: John's infuriating — he always gets bad-tempered when he loses a sett.

LARITA: I ought to have watched, after all, to keep him in order.

SARAH: I stole a cigarette out of your rich and rare case, Lari.

LARITA: That was revolting of you. I don't think I can forgive it.

HILDA and PHILIP *come in from verandah.*

HILDA: Aren't you going to play any more, John?

JOHN (*eagerly*): Yes, rather.

SARAH: I should stay and talk to Lari if I were you, John—you've neglected her shamefully.

PHILIP: I'll stay with Mrs. John.

LARITA: You're all very kind and considerate—I really only want someone to hold my knitting. (*She makes a gesture of winding wool.*)

HILDA: I want Philip to play.

LARITA: I'll come and glare at you all with eyes starting out of my head like prawns.

SARAH: No, don't. There's nothing so hideously dull as watching people play games you're not particularly interested in. Come on, Hilda—you and I will play Philip. He can beat us easily.

HILDA (*satisfied*): All right.

SARAH: Come along.

LARITA (*lightly*): Thanks, Sarah darling. (*She blows a kiss to her.*)

SARAH, HILDA and PHILIP go off.

JOHN (*noticing LARITA is still wearing her coat*): Are you still cold?

LARITA: No, not really. I'll take this off if it annoys you. (*She does so.*)

JOHN: I don't mind.

LARITA: What shall we do? Go for a nice drive in the motor?

JOHN: Would you like to?

LARITA: No, dear—don't look so scared; I should hate it.

JOHN: I'm sorry if you think I've been neglecting you lately, Lari.

LARITA: Sarah put that into your head; I didn't.

JOHN: But have I?

LARITA: No. I think I've been neglecting you.

JOHN: I'm afraid I've been thoughtless and beastly.

LARITA (*smiling*): Dear Johnnie. (*She pats his hand.*)

JOHN: I say, you have got some strong scent on.

LARITA: It's very good, though, isn't it? (*She leans forward so that he can smell it better.*)

JOHN (*with forced enthusiasm*): Lovely.

LARITA: Why are you looking so depressed?

JOHN: I'm not depressed.

LARITA: I hope you haven't been overtiring yourself—at tennis?

JOHN: Of course I haven't.

LARITA (*seriously*): Kiss me, Johnnie.

JOHN: All right. (*He does so.*)

LARITA: I think I'd better put on my fur coat again.

JOHN: What's the matter with you to-day, Lari?

LARITA: Don't you know?

JOHN: No.

LARITA: We're married.

JOHN: What do you mean?

LARITA: That's what's the matter with both of us.

JOHN: There's nothing the matter with me.

LARITA: Isn't there?

JOHN: I feel a bit tired, that's all.

LARITA: Yes, I believe you do.

JOHN: I think you were right—I *have* been rather strenuous to-day.

LARITA: Poor darling!

JOHN: And we've got this awful dance to-night.

LARITA: Aren't you looking forward to it?

JOHN: Not particularly.

LARITA: Let's run away secretly to Deauville.

JOHN: How can we?

LARITA (*smiling*): It's all right. I didn't mean it; that was a joke.

JOHN: Oh, I see.

LARITA: You mustn't be dull. (*She laughs.*)

JOHN: Oh, do stop twitting me!

LARITA: Twitting! What a ridiculous expression.

JOHN: You're always in some mood or another.

LARITA: Surely that's quite natural?

JOHN: I suppose it's my fault, really, for leaving you alone so much. But still, I *do* think——

LARITA: If you're going to be magnanimous, do it gracefully.

JOHN: There you are, you see. Whenever I try——

LARITA (*sharply*): You weren't trying hard enough.

JOHN: Anyone would think I'd been deliberately planning to annoy you.

LARITA: Deliberately or not—you've succeeded.

JOHN: I don't see what I've done.

LARITA: You play tennis eternally—tennis—tennis—tennis! Such a pretty game.

JOHN: It's healthier than sitting indoors, anyway.

LARITA: I believe it develops the muscles to an alarming extent.

JOHN: You don't want me to be flabby, do you?

LARITA: Mentally or physically?

JOHN: Lari, look here, I——

LARITA: I'm getting flabby mentally—and I can't bear it.

JOHN: Well, it's not my fault.

LARITA: Yes, it is.

JOHN: How?

LARITA: Come away—come abroad again.

JOHN: We can't—you know we can't—possibly.

LARITA: Why?

JOHN: It's unfair of you to ask me.

LARITA: Yes, it is—I suppose.

JOHN: After all, this is my life, and it always will be.

LARITA: Will it?

JOHN: Of course.

LARITA: And mine?

JOHN: Naturally.

LARITA: How secure that sounds.

JOHN: Secure?

LARITA: Yes. Words are such silly things. When you said "Naturally" like that it sounded like everything I want in the world; but I know in my heart it meant nothing.

JOHN: I don't understand.

LARITA: That's why it meant nothing.

JOHN: Are you really dissatisfied?

LARITA: Yes.

JOHN: You're not happy here at all?

LARITA: No.

JOHN: Why?

LARITA: Because you've stopped loving me.

JOHN (*startled*): Lari!

LARITA: It's true.

JOHN: But you're wrong—I haven't stopped loving you.

LARITA (*lightly*): Liar!

JOHN: Look here, you're hysterical and upset because I've been neglecting you.

LARITA: No, dear, it isn't that.

JOHN: I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life.

LARITA: Neither have I.

JOHN: Why, we've only been married six months.

LARITA: It might be six years.

JOHN: It looks more as though you'd stopped loving me.

LARITA: Oh, John, don't be *silly*.

JOHN (*hotly*): I'm not silly! You're always irritable and snappy these days—you never used to be.

LARITA: I'm sorry.

JOHN: If you were a bit more interested in everything

here and didn't retire into your shell so much, you'd be far happier.

LARITA: Does your mother want me to be interested?

JOHN: Of course she does.

LARITA: Then why does she snub me and discourage me whenever I make the slightest effort?

JOHN: She doesn't mean to. You're too sensitive.

LARITA: Sensitive! (*She laughs.*)

JOHN: Yes, you think everybody's against you.

LARITA: So they are—except your father and Sarah.

JOHN: Marion's been sweet to you, and Hilda—

LARITA: Hilda evinced a high-school passion for me when I first arrived—which has since reacted into black hatred.

JOHN: Rot!

LARITA: It isn't rot. Marion is gratuitously patronising.

JOHN: She's nothing of the sort.

LARITA: Her religious views forbid her to hate me openly.

JOHN: It's beastly of you to say things like that.

LARITA: I'm losing my temper at last—it's a good sign.

JOHN: I'm glad you think so.

LARITA: I've repressed it for so long, and repression's bad. Look at Marion.

JOHN: I don't know what you mean.

LARITA: No—you wouldn't.

JOHN: But I suppose it's something unpleasant.

LARITA: Quite right—it is.

JOHN: Well, will you please remember that Marion is my sister.

LARITA: I shouldn't think of her at all if she weren't.

JOHN: You're behaving like a child.

LARITA: I can't tell you what a wonderful relief it is.

JOHN: It's damned inconsiderate.

LARITA: Yes—my turn now!

JOHN: Look here, Lari—

LARITA: Don't try and stop me. Let me go on and on—or I shall burst.

JOHN: Don't talk so loudly.

LARITA: Why not? No one would be in the least surprised to find me rolling about on the floor, soaked in drugs and hiccoughing. They almost expect it of me. Surely a little shouting won't matter—it will gratify their conception of my character.

JOHN: I've never seen you like this before.

LARITA: No, it doesn't happen often.

JOHN: Thank God for that!

LARITA: Splendid! Repartee helps. I like you to play up. This is our first row, you know.

JOHN (*sullenly*): I hope it will be our last.

LARITA: It may be—quite possibly.

JOHN: As far as I can see, you're just thoroughly bad-tempered because I haven't been dancing attendance on you all the time.

LARITA: If you can only see as far as that, you're extraordinarily short-sighted.

JOHN: All the same, I'm right.

LARITA: How I wish you were!

JOHN: If things have been upsetting you for so long, why on earth didn't you tell me before?

LARITA: I was hoping against hope that you'd see for yourself.

JOHN (*turning away irritably*): Oh, what's the use of

arguing and bickering like this? It doesn't lead anywhere.

LARITA: You never know—it might lead to the end of everything.

JOHN: Do you want it to?

LARITA: Do you?

JOHN: No, I don't. All I want is peace and quiet.

LARITA: You're far too young to make a remark like that seriously.

JOHN: I can't help my age.

LARITA: You said just now that you loved me still.

JOHN: I certainly don't when you go on like this.

LARITA: I wanted to see how much it would stand.

JOHN: Wasn't that rather silly?

LARITA: No, it *wasn't* silly. Three months ago you'd never have spoken to me as you have to-day. Whatever I'd done. I've been watching your passion for me die. I didn't mind that so much; it was inevitable. Then I waited very anxiously to see if there were any real love and affection behind it—and I've seen the little there was slowly crushed out of you by the uplifting atmosphere of your home and family. Whatever I do now doesn't matter any more—it's too late.

JOHN: Look here, Lari——

LARITA: I've shown myself to you quarrelsome and cheap and ugly for the first time—and it hasn't hurt you; it's only irritated you. You're miles away from me already.

JOHN: You're utterly unreasonable—you imagine things.

LARITA: Do I?

JOHN: I realise that I'm to blame for leaving you alone so much—and, honestly, I'm sorry.

LARITA: Do you really believe that that accounts for it all?

JOHN: Yes.

LARITA: Well, let's pretend it's true—for a little longer.

JOHN: There's no need to pretend.

LARITA: Give me my handkerchief, will you?—it's in my bag.

JOHN (*finding it*): Here you are.

LARITA: Thanks. (*She dabs her eyes and blows her nose.*)
I hope I'm not going to have a cold.

JOHN: I'll see that you don't get miserable and upset any more.

LARITA (*half smiling*): Will you, Johnnie?

JOHN: Yes—and I'll talk to mother.

LARITA: No, don't do that.

JOHN: I will. I don't think she's been quite fair.

LARITA: Please don't say a word—promise me you won't. It wouldn't do the slightest good. She's your mother, and I do see her point, you know.

JOHN: As a matter of fact, I should rather like to go abroad again in September—Venice or somewhere.

LARITA: It would be lovely. (*She laughs.*)

JOHN (*suspiciously*): Why are you laughing?

LARITA: Because I feel happier.

JOHN: Or Algiers—I've never been to Algiers.

LARITA: If we went to Algiers, we could stay with the Lessings.

JOHN: I don't know them.

LARITA: They're darlings. She's an American. She used to design people's houses. We had great fun in New York.

JOHN: I never knew you'd been to New York.

LARITA: I must have told you—I was there for ages.

JOHN: You didn't. Was it before you married?

LARITA: No; after.

JOHN: I thought you lived in Paris all the time.

LARITA: Not all the time.

JOHN: Why did you go?

LARITA: Oh, I don't know—the tall buildings and the champagne air—so fascinating.

JOHN: Did you go alone?

LARITA: Yes—but the boat was crowded.

JOHN: Why didn't you tell me?

LARITA: I thought I had. It doesn't matter though, does it?

JOHN: What did you do there?

LARITA: Really, Johnnie—nothing particular.

JOHN: You never told me much, you know—about anything.

LARITA: I'll write my memoirs one day; then all will be disclosed.

JOHN: Is Francis alive now?

LARITA: Oh, yes; he's kicking about somewhere.

JOHN: You never hear from him?

LARITA: Of course not. I don't consider it chic to receive chatty letters from ex-husbands.

JOHN: I only wondered.

LARITA: Well, you needn't have.

JOHN: Mother's always trying to pump me about your early life.

LARITA: And what do you say?

JOHN: Nothing. I feel rather a fool.

LARITA: Never mind, dear.

JOHN: It's natural that she should be curious, I suppose.

LARITA: Oh, quite.

JOHN: And that I should be, too.

LARITA: I never realised you were.

JOHN: You are my wife, after all.

LARITA: Yes, isn't it lovely?

JOHN: Do you regret anything?

LARITA: Hundreds of things.

JOHN: But seriously——

LARITA: The home atmosphere is certainly having its effect on you.

JOHN: How do you mean?

LARITA: You never cross-questioned me before.

JOHN: I'm not cross-questioning you.

LARITA: Yes, you are—a little.

JOHN: I'm sorry. I won't any more.

LARITA: It betrays a certain lack of trust.

JOHN: Lari, how can you!

LARITA: You see, when we married, we married because we loved one another—no explanations were necessary on either side.

JOHN: They're not necessary now, only——

LARITA: Only you're feeling a little uncomfortable—is that it?

JOHN: No, not exactly.

LARITA: It's all a question of values.

JOHN: Values?

LARITA: Yes, the scales are awfully erratic. When we met and fell in love, nothing else mattered as long as we were together. But when the first fine careless rapture wears off, other things begin to obtrude themselves—one

has to readjust oneself to see clearly. What had happened to either of us in the past didn't count a bit at first—why should it?—everything was new and exciting. Now it's not new and exciting any more; we've grown used to one another, so to alleviate the monotony we start prying about behind the scenes—trying to find out things about each other that haven't any real bearing on the case at all. It's inevitable with such a hideously intimate relationship as marriage.

JOHN: I don't want to find out anything.

LARITA: You may not want to, but you'll persevere until you do. It's human nature.

JOHN: I'd hoped there was nothing to find.

LARITA: There's always something—somewhere.

JOHN: Don't let's say any more about it.

LARITA: Very well. (*She takes out her powder-puff and powders her nose.*)

JOHN: I trust you absolutely.

LARITA: Whatever happens in the future, dear, I want you to remember one thing—I've never deceived you and I've never lied to you. There are many things that I've purposely left unexplained, because they don't concern you in the least and don't apply in any sense to our life together.

JOHN: Darling! (*He kisses her very sweetly, and she smoothes his hair.*)

LARITA: You've rubbed all the powder off my nose.

JOHN: I don't care a bit.

LARITA: Go and play some more tennis—you've been in the house far too long; it isn't healthy.

JOHN: Don't be a beast.

LARITA: Away with you—I'm going to rest before tea.

JOHN: I'll come and rest too.

LARITA: No, you won't. We should go on talking and talking and talking until our heads fell off.

JOHN: Oh, all right. (*He kisses his hand lightly and goes into the garden.*)

LARITA is about to go upstairs when MARION comes down.

MARION: Hallo! old girl.

LARITA: Hallo!

MARION: Are you going upstairs?

LARITA: I was. I thought of lying down a little.

MARION: You're always lying down.

LARITA: Yes, isn't it strange? I expect there's something organically wrong with me.

MARION (*anxiously*): I hope there isn't.

LARITA (*beginning to go*): Well, I'll see you later on—

MARION (*touching her arm*): Don't go. I've been wanting to talk to you.

LARITA: To me? Why—what about?—anything important?

MARION: No; just everything.

LARITA: That ought to take several years.

MARION (*laughing forcedly*): I didn't mean it literally.

LARITA: Oh, I see.

MARION: Have you got a cigarette on you?

LARITA: Yes, certainly. Here. (*She hands her case.*)

MARION (*taking one*): Thanks.

LARITA (*amiably*): Why aren't you watching the tennis?

MARION (*insensible of irony*): I've been too busy all the afternoon.

LARITA: How are all the preparations for to-night going?

MARION: All right. You're sitting next to Mr. Furley.

LARITA: Splendid. Is he nice?

MARION: He's a damned good sort—rather High Church, you know; almost ritualistic.

LARITA: He won't be ritualistic at dinner, will he?

MARION: And you've got Sir George on the other side of you.

LARITA: Sir George who?

MARION: Sir George Bentley. He's awfully well up in dead languages and things.

LARITA: I do hope I shall be a comfort to him.

MARION: Very interesting man, George Bentley.

LARITA: How many are dining altogether?

MARION: Only twelve—we haven't really room for more comfortably.

LARITA: I hope it will all be an enormous success.

MARION: You won't be offended if I ask you something—just between ourselves?

LARITA: That depends, Marion. What is it?

MARION: Speaking as a pal, you know.

LARITA (*vaguely*): Oh, yes—well?

MARION: Don't encourage father too much.

LARITA: In what way—encourage him? I don't understand.

MARION: Well, you know—you and he are always getting up arguments together.

LARITA: Why shouldn't we?

MARION: It annoys mother so when he tries to be funny.

LARITA: I've never noticed him trying to be funny—he's a very intelligent man.

MARION: Sometimes when you're discussing certain subjects, he says things which are not quite——

LARITA: You say "certain subjects" in rather a sinister way, Marion. What subjects do you mean particularly?

MARION: Well, sex and things like that. You were talking about the Ericson divorce case the other day at lunch, when Harry Emsworth was here——

LARITA: It's an extraordinarily interesting case.

MARION: Yes, but one doesn't discuss things like that openly in front of strangers—I mean to say, it doesn't matter a bit when we're by ourselves; no one could be more broad-minded than I am—after all, what's the use of being in the world at all if you shut your eyes to things?

LARITA (*crisply*): Exactly.

MARION: You're not angry, are you?

LARITA: Angry?—no.

MARION: You see, I like you, Lari; we get on well together. I grant you we see things from different points of view, but that's only natural.

LARITA: Yes—oh, yes.

MARION: I knew you'd be a sport about it and not mind. You see, my philosophy in life is frankness. Say what you've got to say, and have done.

LARITA: In other words—moral courage.

MARION: Yes, that's it.

LARITA: Why didn't you attack the Colonel on these little breaches of etiquette? He seems to be more to blame than I.

MARION: A woman always understands better than a man.

LARITA: Surely that's a little sweeping.

MARION: It's true, all the same. I knew you'd see.

LARITA: You weren't by any chance afraid that he'd laugh at you?

MARION: Good heavens, no! I don't mind being laughed at.

LARITA: How extraordinary! I hate it.

MARION: What does it matter? If you've got something to say, say it.

LARITA: According to your code, the fact of having spoken like that about your father doesn't strike you as being disloyal in any way, does it?

MARION: Not between pals like us.

LARITA: Of course, yes—pals. I keep forgetting.

MARION: I believe you *are* angry.

LARITA: I'm not—but I'm very, very interested.

MARION: Look here, Lari, it's like this. Father's been a bit of a dog in his day. Mother's had a pretty bad time with him, and she's stood by him through thick and thin.

LARITA: How splendid!

MARION: Some men are like that—no moral responsibility. Edgar, you know, was just the same.

LARITA: You say "was." Has he reformed?

MARION: I think I've made him see—but it's been a tough struggle.

LARITA: What have you made him see?

MARION: I've made him see that nothing matters if you keep your life straight and decent.

LARITA: There are so many varying opinions as to what is straight and decent.

MARION: God admits of no varying opinions.

LARITA: Your religion must be wonderfully comforting. It makes you so sure of yourself.

MARION: If you're going to take up that tone, we won't discuss it.

LARITA: No—we'd better not.

MARION (*gently*): You mustn't jeer at religion, old girl. (*She puts her hand on her arm.*)

LARITA (*shaking her off*): I don't jeer at religion—but I jeer at hypocrisy.

MARION: *I'm not a hypocrite—if that's what you mean.*

LARITA (*quietly*): I'm afraid you are, Marion—and a disloyal one, too, which makes it all the more nauseating.

MARION: How dare you speak to me like that!

Enter PHILIP BORDON from the garden.

PHILIP (*to LARITA*): Hallo!—I wondered if you were still here.

LARITA: You must be exhausted. You've been at it steadily all the afternoon.

PHILIP: John and Sarah are playing a single now, and Hilda's sitting on the steps, scoring.

MARION, livid with rage, takes a writing-block off the bureau and marches into the library.

(*Looks after her in some surprise.*) What's up?

LARITA: We've been arguing about the dinner guests—it's all very difficult.

PHILIP: I wish I was dining.

LARITA: But you're coming directly afterwards, aren't you?

PHILIP: Rather! About ten of us.

LARITA: Good heavens!

PHILIP: Will you keep a dance for me?

LARITA: Certainly.

PHILIP: What number?

LARITA: I don't know.

PHILIP: Three?

LARITA: Perhaps you won't be here in time.

PHILIP: Say five, then, and six.

LARITA (*laughing*): Not two running! We should be bored stiff with each other.

PHILIP: Five and seven, then?

LARITA: All right.

PHILIP: You won't forget?

LARITA: Of course not.

PHILIP: I'm sure you dance wonderfully.

LARITA: Why?

PHILIP: Because of the way you move.

LARITA: Oh, thank you very much.

PHILIP: I mean it.

LARITA: Well, it's very sweet of you. (*She sits on sofa.*)

PHILIP: May I sit next to you?

LARITA: Certainly, if you like. (*She makes room for him.*)

PHILIP (*sitting down*): I'm afraid I'm awfully hot and sticky.

LARITA (*laughing out loud*): I don't mind as long as you keep your end.

PHILIP: Don't laugh at me.

LARITA: I'm sorry—but you are rather funny.

PHILIP (*gloomy*): Everyone says that.

LARITA: Never mind. Be frank—speak straight from the shoulder—say what you have to say, and have done.

PHILIP (*surprised*): I beg your pardon?

LARITA: It's all right—I was only quoting.

PHILIP: Oh, I see.

LARITA: You must forgive me if I'm a little distract—I've had a rather trying afternoon.

PHILIP: Everybody fussing round, I suppose, over the dance?

LARITA: Yes—more or less.

PHILIP: People take things so damned seriously.

LARITA: You don't think it's a good plan to take things seriously?

PHILIP: Oh, sometimes, of course, but——

LARITA: I'm inclined to agree with you.

PHILIP: Life's too short to worry over things.

LARITA: It *is* miserably short, isn't it?

PHILIP: Rather!

LARITA: I sometimes wonder why we're here at all—it seems such a waste of time.

PHILIP: You're laughing again.

LARITA: Not altogether.

PHILIP: No one ever thought old John would marry anyone like you.

LARITA: Do you know that remark positively made me jump.

PHILIP: You're so different and so alive. He's a lucky devil.

LARITA: You must be careful with your compliments. If you go peppering them about like that, they'll lose value.

PHILIP: They're not compliments—they're true.

LARITA: Do you always go on like this?

PHILIP: Of course not. I wouldn't dare.

LARITA: Forgive me for asking—but do you lead a straight and decent life?

PHILIP (*alarmed*): What!

LARITA: It's *so* important. Whenever you feel yourself slipping, think of me.

PHILIP: I don't quite understand.

LARITA: On second thoughts, it would be better if you thought of Marion.

PHILIP: I'd rather think of you.

LARITA: Good! I must leave you now—I've been trying to get to my room for the last hour. (*She rises.*)

PHILIP (*catching her hand*): Please don't go yet.

HILDA bounces in in time to see LARITA withdrawing her hand from PHILIP's grasp.

LARITA: I must, really.

HILDA (*furiously*): Oh!

PHILIP (*rising*): Hallo! Have they finished?

HILDA: I wondered where you were—I might have known. (*She shoots a malignant glance at LARITA.*)

LARITA (*frowning*): Hilda!

HILDA: I hope I'm not intruding.

LARITA (*irritably*): This is too much!

HILDA: Yes, it is!

LARITA: If you adopt that rather rude tone to me, Hilda, I'm afraid I shall have to poach on Marion's preserves and have a straight talk to you.

PHILIP: Look here, Hilda—

HILDA: Don't speak to me!

FURBER enters with various tea-things. MRS. WHITTAKER comes downstairs.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Has anyone seen my little blue notebook? I can't think where I left it.

FURBER finds it on the bureau.

FURBER: Is this the one, ma'am?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes—thank you, Furber. It's really too annoying, Harris has never come—you'd better send down after tea.

FURBER: Very good, ma'am.

SARAH and JOHN come in.

JOHN (*to LARITA*): Did you get your rest, darling?

LARITA: No—but it doesn't matter.

SARAH: Mrs. Whittaker, Philip and I must really go now. I've left mother all alone with herds of strange people.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Won't you have some tea first? It's all ready.

SARAH: No, honestly—I daren't. She'll be cross as it is.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Very well. Be in good time to-night.

SARAH: I don't intend to miss one dance. Come along, Philip.

PHILIP (*shaking hands with MRS. WHITTAKER*): Good-bye, and thanks awfully.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Until to-night.

PHILIP: Rather! (*He goes to LARITA.*) I say—— (*He looks at HILDA, who glowers at him.*)

LARITA: Good-bye for the moment—you must make me laugh some more to-night.

PHILIP: Remember—five and seven.

LARITA: I won't forget.

SARAH: Come on, Philip! See you later, Lari.

LARITA: Yes. Good-bye.

SARAH and PHILIP go off. FURBER brings in the tea-pot.

JOHN: I'm going up to have a bath—I don't want any tea.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Oh, John—just one cup.

JOHN: No, mother. I've had tons of ginger-beer during the afternoon. Come up after, Lari.

LARITA: All right, dear.

JOHN *bounds off upstairs.*

MARION and the COLONEL come in from the library.

MARION *is fuming.*

COLONEL: If you don't like my opinions, you shouldn't ask for them.

MARION: I'm not used to having that sort of thing said to me.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*with a look towards FURBER*): Marion, please!

MARION (*flopping down*): Father's impossible!

FURBER *goes out.*

MRS. WHITTAKER: I do wish you'd control your temper in front of the servants, Marion.

HILDA: Other people besides Marion ought to control themselves.

MRS. WHITTAKER: What do you mean, Hilda?

HILDA: Ask Lari—she knows what I mean.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Come and sit down and have your tea.

HILDA: Disgusting, I call it!

MARION: What's disgusting?

HILDA: Ask Lari.

LARITA (*quietly*): Hadn't you better explain yourself, Hilda, instead of referring everyone to me?

HILDA: I pity John —that's all.

COLONEL (*angrily*): Have you gone mad, Hilda?

MRS. WHITTAKER: What on earth's the matter?

HILDA: I came in suddenly, and found Lari canoodling on the sofa with Philip.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Don't use such expressions, Hilda—I'm surprised at you. Come and sit down, Larita.

LARITA: I think I'll go to my room, if you don't mind.

HILDA: She's frightened because she knows I've found her out.

LARITA *stifles an exclamation of rage.*

COLONEL: Stop, Hilda! I forbid you to say another word.

HILDA (*hysterically*): I won't stop—I know something you none of you know, only I wasn't going to say anything about it—until after the dance. (*She goes, in dead silence, to the bookcase, takes down a book, and takes a newspaper cutting out of it; she gives it to Mrs. Whittaker.*) Look at that, mother. I got it from Sir George when I went there on Tuesday—he keeps all the back numbers of *The Times*, in files. I cut it out when he was in the garden.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*reading cutting*): Marion—Jim—
(*She puts out her hand.*)

MARION *approaches and reads the cutting too.* The

COLONEL *turns away.*

LARITA: I should like some bread-and-butter, please.

COLONEL: Here you are, my dear. (*He hands it to her.*)

HILDA: And I'm glad I did—glad.

COLONEL (*ignoring her*): Do you want any jam with it?

LARITA: No thanks; I always drop it all over myself.

HILDA (*shrilly*): It's no use pretending to be so calm. You know the game's up now, don't you?

LARITA (*serenely*): Specially strawberry—the runny kind.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Hilda, be quiet. (*She sits back and closes her eyes.*)

MARION: We'd better have this out and face it, hadn't we?

LARITA: By all means. What happened?

MARION (*handing her cutting*): I suppose you don't deny that that's you?

LARITA (*glancing at it and handing it back*): I've always hated that photograph.

MARION: You'd better read it, father.

COLONEL: Certainly not. I haven't the faintest desire to see it.

LARITA (*taking it and handing it to him*): Please do—all my friends know about this. I ought to have told you before, really, but it didn't seem necessary.

COLONEL: Really, I'd rather not.

LARITA: Please—it's necessary now.

There is silence while the COLONEL reads the cutting.

LARITA *drinks a little tea.*

COLONEL: Well, what of it? (*He tears up the cutting.*)

HILDA: Father!

LARITA: That was unkind. Hilda went to such a lot of trouble to get it.

MRS. WHITTAKER: This is appalling!

COLONEL: Why? Larita's past is no affair of ours.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You seem to forget—she's married to our son—our son— (*She breaks down.*)

MARION (*putting her arm round her*): Mother, don't give way.

COLONEL: I must apologise for this unpleasant scene, Lari.

LARITA: It had to occur, sooner or later.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*raising her head; to LARITA, bitterly*): I hope you're satisfied.

LARITA: I'm not at all satisfied, I think—with the exception of the Colonel—that you're all behaving ridiculously.

MARION: It's easy to adopt a light tone—when you've brought degradation on to us.

COLONEL: Don't be a fool, Marion.

MARION: I'm not surprised at your attitude, father. Larita's your sort, isn't she?

LARITA: That's one of the nicest things that have ever been said to me.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Don't talk like that, Marion—it's useless.

MARION (*firmly*): The question is—what's to be done? (*To LARITA*) Does John know about this?

LARITA: Mind your own business.

FURBER *enters*.

FURBER (*announcing*): Mr. Harris.

MRS. WHITTAKER *gives a gasp of horror, and HARRIS enters. He is a thick-set, affable little man.*

HARRIS (*brightly*): Sorry I couldn't come up before, Mrs. Whittaker, but we've 'ad a busy day down at the White 'Art, what with one thing and another.

There is silence for a moment, then MARION speaks.

MARION (*with an effort*): My mother's not feeling very well, Harris; perhaps you'd call a little later.

HARRIS (*sympathetically*): Oh, I am sorry to 'ear that—but time's getting on, you know—I've got to get back inside of 'arf an hour. If you'd just tell me where you want the fairy lights put, I could run 'em up right away.

MARION (*helplessly*): I don't really think——

LARITA (*rising*): I can show you from here——

HARRIS: Oh, thanks very much—if it isn't troubling you——

LARITA: Not at all. Look —(*she moves to the window*) we want chains—between those four big trees—and some on the arch leading to the rose garden.

HARRIS (*jotting it down*): Mixed colours, or shall I make it a scheme?

LARITA: Mixed colours would be better, I think.

HARRIS: Right you are.

LARITA: And if you could arrange some round the summer-house—— (*To COLONEL*) Just a few, don't you think?

COLONEL: Oh, yes, certainly; it will brighten it up.

HARRIS (*still jotting*): Rose h'arch—summer-'ouse.— What about the Chinese lanterns?

LARITA: Furber can manage those, I think. We've got them all here.

HARRIS: Righto, then, that's that. I'll get 'em up in no time. It ought to look very pretty and gay.

LARITA: I'm sure it will.

HARRIS: Can I go out this way?

LARITA: Oh, yes, by all means.

HARRIS: Thanks very much. Sorry to have troubled you. Hope you'll be feeling better by to-night, Mrs. Whittaker. Good afternoon. (*To HILDA*) Good afternoon, miss.

HILDA (*jumping*): Oh—good afternoon.

He goes importantly out on to the verandah and out into the garden.

LARITA sits down again and goes on with her tea.

MRS. WHITTAKER has been busy regaining her self-control; her face is slightly suffused with rage.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*with forced calm*): Larita, will you oblige me by going to your room, please? We will discuss this later.

LARITA: Certainly not. I haven't finished my tea.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Doubtless you imagine that you are carrying off this—this abominable situation with a high hand, but your callousness only goes to prove that your senses must be blunted to all decent feelings.

LARITA (*quietly*): Nothing I have ever done warrants your speaking like that.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You have married my son!

LARITA: I married John because I loved him.

MARION: Under false pretences.

LARITA: There were no false pretences.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Do you think he'd have married you if he'd known?

LARITA: I expect so.

MARION: Then why didn't you tell him?

LARITA: Because I didn't consider it necessary. We took one another on trust. What happened before I met him concerns no one but myself. I've never let John down in any way—I love him.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You married John because you wished to break away from your disgraceful life and gain a position to which you were not entitled.

LARITA: It's natural that you should think that, but it's not true.

COLONEL: Larita, please go upstairs, and let me deal with this.

LARITA: No—honestly, I'd rather stay. I understand Mrs. Whittaker's attitude perfectly, and I sympathise with it. It's horrible for her—but I don't want her to labour under any misapprehension.

MARION: In the face of everything, I'm afraid there's very little room for misapprehension.

LARITA: Your life is built up on misapprehensions, Marion. You don't understand or know anything—you blunder about like a lost sheep.

MARION: Abuse won't help you.

LARITA: That's not abuse—it's frankness.

MRS. WHITTAKER: This is beside the point.

LARITA: Not altogether—it's an attitude of mind which you all share.

COLONEL: Instead of jumping to the worst conclusions at once, wouldn't it be better to give Larita a little time to explain? We may be doing her an injustice.

LARITA: That's kind of you. I haven't the faintest intention of making excuses or trying to conceal anything!—that newspaper cutting was perfectly accurate—as far as it went. I *was* concerned in that peculiarly unpleasant case. I changed my name afterwards for obvious reasons. The papers rather over-reached themselves in publishing the number of my lovers—only two of the list really loved me.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You were responsible for a man killing himself.

LARITA: Certainly not. It was his weakness and cowardice that were responsible for that—not I.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It's incredible—dreadful—I can hardly believe it.

LARITA: I felt like that at the time, but it's a long while ago.

MARION: Fifteen years! John was a child.

LARITA: Thank you. I quite realise that.

MRS. WHITTAKER: And how have you lived since this—this—scandal?

LARITA: Extremely well.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Your flippancy is unpardonable.

LARITA: So was your question. I've only explained so far because, as you're John's mother, I felt I owed it to you; but if you persist in this censorious attitude I shall say no more.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Do you realise what you've done?

LARITA: Perfectly, and I regret nothing. The only thing that counts in this instance is my relationship with John. Nothing that has occurred in the past affects that in the least.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Your marrying him was an outrage.

LARITA: Why? I've told you before, I love him.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You prove your love by soiling his name irreparably.

LARITA: Nonsense.

COLONEL: Do you think it's quite fair, Mabel, to set ourselves up in judgment on Larita? We know none of the circumstances which led to these bygone incidents?

MRS. WHITTAKER: You've failed me too often before, Jim, so I'm not surprised that you fail me now.

LARITA: The Colonel's not failing you—it's just as bad for him as for you. You don't suppose he *likes* the idea of his only son being tied up to me, after these—revelations? But somehow or other, in the face of overwhelming op-

position, he's managed to arrive at a truer sense of values than you could any of you ever understand. He's not allowed himself to be cluttered up with hypocritical moral codes and false sentiments—he sees things as they are, and tries to make the best of them. He's tried to make the best of me ever since I've been here.

MARION: That hasn't astonished us in the least.

LARITA: No doubt, with your pure and unsullied conception of human nature, you can only find one meaning for the Colonel's kindness to me?

MARION: I didn't say that.

LARITA: You think it, though, don't you? Only this afternoon you asked me not to encourage him.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Marion!

LARITA: You disguised your unpleasant lascivious curiosity under a cloak of hearty friendship—you were pumping me to discover some confirmation of your pretty suspicions. One thing my life has taught me, and that is a knowledge of feminine psychology. I've met your type before.

MARION: How dare you! How dare you!

MRS. WHITTAKER (*rising*): This is insupportable.

LARITA (*sharply*): Yes, it is.—Sit down.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*impotently*): I—I—(*She sits down.*)

LARITA: I want you to understand one thing—I deny nothing. I have a perfect right to say what I like and live how I choose—whether I've married John or whether I haven't, my life is my own, and I don't intend to be brow-beaten.

MARION: I hope God will forgive you.

LARITA: Don't you rather overrate the Almighty's interest in the situation?

MRS. WHITTAKER: In the face of your brazen attitude, there's nothing more to be said.

LARITA: You're wrong. There's a good deal more to be said. According to you, I ensnared John in my toils in order to break away from my old life and better my position. If that were the case, what do you mean by deliberately trying to crush down my efforts to reform myself? How do you reconcile that with your stereotyped views of virtue and charity? But you needn't worry; I didn't marry John to reform myself. I don't consider my position in this house a step up, socially or spiritually. On the contrary, it's been probably the most demoralising experience that's ever happened to me.

MRS. WHITTAKER: You're a wicked, wicked woman.

LARITA: That remark was utterly fatuous and completely mechanical. You didn't even think before you said it—your brain is so muddled up with false values that you're incapable of grasping anything in the least real. Why am I a wicked woman?

MRS. WHITTAKER: You betrayed my son's honour by taking advantage of his youth and mad infatuation for you. He'd never have married you if he'd known.

LARITA: I suppose you wouldn't consider it betraying his honour if he'd had an affair with me and not married me?

MRS. WHITTAKER: It would certainly have been much more appropriate.

LARITA: Unfortunately, I don't consider John worthy

of me in either capacity—I realised a long time ago that our marriage was a mistake, but not from your point of view—from my own.

MARION: It's easy to talk like that now.

LARITA: It isn't easy—it's heartbreaking. I love John more than I can ever say, but it's not blind love—unfortunately—I can see through him. He's charming and weak and inadequate, and he's brought me down to the dust.

MRS. WHITTAKER: How dare you say such vile things! How dare you!

LARITA: It's true. You can't appreciate my feelings about it. I don't expect you to.

MARION: I should think not.

LARITA: Your treatment of all this shows a regrettable lack of discrimination. You seem to be floundering under the delusion that I'm a professional *cocotte*. You're quite, quite wrong—I've never had an affair with a man I wasn't fond of. The only time I ever sold myself was in the eyes of God to my first husband—my mother arranged it. I was really too young to know what I was doing. You approve of that sort of bargaining, don't you?—it's within the law.

MARION (*contemptuously*): Huh!

LARITA: Why do you make that peculiar noise, Marion? Does it indicate approval, contempt, or merely asthma?

MARION: Do you think this is the moment to be facetious?

LARITA: You're an unbelievable prig.

MARION: I hope you don't imagine that your insults could ever have any effect on me?

LARITA: If you only knew it, I'm at your mercy com-

pletely, but you're too silly to take advantage of it—you choose the wrong tactics.

MARION: We're certainly not experienced in dealing with women of your sort, if that's what you mean.

LARITA: It *is* what I mean—entirely. I'm completely outside the bounds of your understanding—in every way. And yet I know you, Marion, through and through—far better than you know yourself. You're a pitiful figure, and there are thousands like you—victims of convention and upbringing. All your life you've ground down perfectly natural sex impulses, until your mind has become a morass of inhibitions—your repression has run into the usual channel of religious hysteria. You've placed physical purity too high and mental purity not high enough. And you'll be a miserable woman until the end of your days unless you readjust the balance.

MARION (*rising impetuously*): You're revolting—horrible!

LARITA: You need love and affection terribly—you'd go to any lengths to obtain it except the right ones. You swear and smoke and assume an air of spurious heartiness because you're not sure of your own religion and are afraid of being thought a prude. You try to establish a feeling of comradeship by sanctimonious heart-to-heart talks. All your ideals are confused and muddled—you don't know what to ask of life, and you'll die never having achieved anything but physical virtue. And God knows I pity you.

MARION, *with as much dignity as she can command, walks into the library without a word, and slams the door.*

MRS. WHITTAKER: You're achieving nothing by all this.

LARITA: How do you know?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Because you're a moral degenerate—lost to all sense of right and wrong.

LARITA: I respect you for one thing, anyhow—you *are* sure of yourself.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I don't want your respect.

LARITA: You're the only one here with the slightest grip. You've risen up like a phoenix from the ashes of your pride. It's quite, quite excellent—and infinitely pathetic.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I don't wish to speak to you any more—until to-morrow. I shall be very grateful if you will remain upstairs this evening—I will make suitable excuses for your absence.

LARITA: You mean you're frightened that I should make a scene?

MRS. WHITTAKER: That is neither here nor there—I certainly don't desire an open scandal.

LARITA: You've run to cover again. I was afraid you would.

MRS. WHITTAKER: This has been painful beyond belief.

COLONEL: You're right—it has.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I don't feel capable of bearing any more.

LARITA: You intend to confine me to my room like a naughty child?

MRS. WHITTAKER: The simile is hardly appropriate, but I hope you will have the decency to remain there.
(*She goes upstairs in silence.*)

COLONEL: Lari—

LARITA: Please go away—I don't want anyone to speak

to me at all for a little. I must think—think— (She is trembling hopelessly and making a tremendous effort to control her nerves.)

COLONEL: Very well. (*He goes out into the garden.*)

HILDA, who has been standing aghast throughout the entire scene, suddenly bursts into floods of tears and rushes at LARITA.

HILDA (*hysterically*): Lari—Lari—forgive me! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean it—

LARITA (*pushing her gently away*): Don't be a little toad, Hilda. Try to have the courage of your convictions.

HILDA *rushes out into the garden, weeping hysterically.*

LARITA *bites her lip; then, still trembling violently, she lights a cigarette and takes "Sodom and Gomorrah" off the bureau. She settles herself on the sofa, obviously exerting every ounce of control, and opens the book methodically; she attempts to read, but her eyes can't focus the page; she is acutely conscious of an imperfect statuette of the Venus de Milo which is smirking at her from a pedestal by the dining-room doors. Suddenly, with all her force, she hurls the book at it, knocking it to the floor and smashing it.*

LARITA: I've always hated that damned thing!

CURTAIN FALLS

When it rises once, she has buried her face in the sofa cushion, and her shoulders are heaving, whether with laughter or tears it is difficult to say.

ACT III

SCENE: *The same. When the curtain rises the dance is in full swing. The actual dancing takes place in the dining-room, because the floor is better. The hall and library are the sitting-out places; the buffet is on the lower end of the verandah, just out of sight of the audience. The festoons of Japanese lanterns and fairy lights look—as MR. HARRIS prophesied—very pretty and gay.*

There is a group of YOUNG PEOPLE clustered round the buffet; their light-hearted conversation can be heard intermittently. Several people are littered about the hall. MISS NINA VANSITTART, attired in a strikingly original rose taffeta frock, with a ribbon of the same shade encircling her hair the wrong way—giving more the impression of a telephone apparatus than a head ornament—is seated on the sofa, basking enthusiastically in the illuminating conversation of the HON. HUGH PETWORTH, a healthy young man, whose unfortunate shape can be luckily accounted for by his athletic prowess. He has had the forethought to wear white gloves which have wrinkled up slightly, displaying below his cuffs a mercifully brief expanse of blood-red wrists.

HUGH: It was a frightful rag.

NINA: I wish I'd been there.

HUGH: If you'd seen old Freddie fall off the roof of the taxi—

NINA (*delightedly*): I should have died—I know I should!

HUGH: And you should have seen the way old Minky Taylor lammed into the commissionaire chap outside the Piccadilly—

NINA (*with whole-hearted sincerity*): Oh, lovely!

A cherubic boy—BOBBY COLEMAN by name—approaches them.

BOBBY: I say, Nina—this is us.

NINA: What number is it?

BOBBY: Nine.

NINA (*rising*): I'll leave my bag here. Keep your eye on it, Hughie.

HUGH: I'm supposed to be dancing this with Lucy.

NINA: Never mind; it will be all right there.

HUGH rises automatically, and subsides again as BOBBY and NINA go into the dance-room. Two YOUNG PEOPLE walk across and out on to the verandah.

1ST YOUNG PERSON: Jolly good tune, that.

2ND YOUNG PERSON: Lovely.

1ST YOUNG PERSON: The garden looks awfully pretty, doesn't it?

2ND YOUNG PERSON: Yes, awfully pretty.

They go off.

HILDA comes out of the library. She is wearing such a pretty blue dress, with stockings to match.

HILDA (*to HUGH*): Why aren't you dancing?

HUGH: I'm supposed to be—with Lucy. Have you seen her anywhere?

EASY VIRTUE

HILDA: Yes, she's in the library. I'm looking for Philip Bordon. Have you seen him anywhere?

HUGH: No. I'll go and get Lucy. Will you dance later?

HILDA: Missing two.

HUGH: Righto. (*He goes off.*)

HILDA goes towards the verandah and meets PHILIP entering.

HILDA: Oh, there you are. This is ours.

PHILIP: Oh—is it?

HILDA: Yes—nine. You said so this afternoon.

PHILIP: Where's Larita?—Mrs. John——?

HILDA: She's upstairs with a bad head—she's not coming down at all.

PHILIP: I say—what a shame! (*Despondently.*)

HILDA (with meaning): Yes, isn't it?

PHILIP (resigned): Come on.

They go into the dance-room. The music stops, and everyone can be heard clapping. Then it goes on again.

HUGH comes out of the library with LUCY, a pretty girl with badly-bobbed hair; her dress is awfully pretty—yellow, with shoes and stockings to match. They go into the dance-room. They meet SARAH and CHARLES coming out, and exchange a few meaningless words.

SARAH flops down on the sofa.

CHARLES: Do you want an ice or anything?

SARAH: No, thanks.

CHARLES (sitting down): That dining-room's far too small and hot to dance in. Why didn't they have the band here?

SARAH: The floor's better in there.

CHARLES: I hadn't noticed it.

SARAH: I'm worried, Charles—about Larita.

CHARLES: Yes—I know.

SARAH: I tried to slip up and see her when we arrived, but Marion stopped me; she said she'd asked particularly to be left alone.

CHARLES: I'm extremely disappointed—I wanted to see her too.

SARAH: Something's happened—I'm sure of it.

CHARLES: What could have?

SARAH: I don't know exactly, but I've got a feeling.

CHARLES: What shall we do about it?

SARAH: Nothing, yet—but I mean to see her somehow, before we go.

CHARLES: John seems quite happy.

SARAH: Mrs. Whittaker doesn't, though, and I haven't seen the Colonel.

CHARLES: They're a tiresome family.

SARAH: Very.

CHARLES: Have you danced with John?

SARAH: Yes—just after we got here.

CHARLES: Did he say anything?

SARAH: Only that she'd got a racking headache and was in bed.

CHARLES: You'd have been able to tell from his manner if anything was wrong.

SARAH: He's either being cleverer than I thought him, or he just doesn't know.

CHARLES: She seemed all right this afternoon, didn't she?—You were here?

SARAH: Yes—more or less.

CHARLES: How do you mean—more or less?

SARAH: I'm furious with John.

CHARLES: Why?

SARAH: He's making her utterly wretched.

CHARLES: That was inevitable.

SARAH: I don't see why.

CHARLES: She's all wrong here—right out of her picture.

SARAH: I know, Charles; but he oughtn't to let her down—it's filthily mean of him.

CHARLES: He can't help it—he doesn't see anything.

SARAH: But he should see. If she's unhappy here, he must take her away.

CHARLES: That wouldn't do any good—ultimately.

SARAH: It was all a fiasco, from the first. I knew that directly I saw her. But still, he ought to play up and stand by her.

CHARLES: I can't imagine anyone of her intelligence being silly enough to marry him.

SARAH: She adores him.

CHARLES: Yes, but—she might have known it would end badly.

SARAH: It hasn't ended badly yet.

CHARLES: It will.

SARAH: Don't be so certain.

CHARLES: You're just as certain.

SARAH: Oh, Charles, I wish she'd been a cheap, loud-voiced cat—it would have been funny then.

CHARLES: Would it?

SARAH: Well, less difficult, anyhow. There would be some excuse for John.

CHARLES: That's what's worrying you, is it?

SARAH: Of course. I used to be awfully fond of him, but he's shrunk over this beyond all recognition—gone tiny.

CHARLES: An observant mind is painful sometimes, isn't it?

SARAH: Damnably.

CHARLES: Would you like to marry me, Sarah?

SARAH: Don't make me laugh, Charles—just now.

CHARLES: I believe I mean it.

SARAH: You're a darling—but you don't. The intoxicating atmosphere of this revelry has gone to your head.

CHARLES: Perhaps.

SARAH: You're not in the least in love with me.

CHARLES: I don't know.

SARAH: But it is frightfully sweet of you to ask me, and I do appreciate it.

CHARLES: We might be awfully happy together.

SARAH: We probably should, but something would be wrong somewhere.

CHARLES: I wonder.

SARAH: You know perfectly well——

CHARLES: I've been paying pretty marked attentions to you during the last six months—surely that proves something?

SARAH: It proves that you like being with me very much, and I like being with you.

CHARLES: Well, then——?

SARAH: Marriage would soon kill all that—without the vital spark to keep it going.

CHARLES: Dear, dear, dear. The way you modern young girls talk—it's shocking, that's what it is!

SARAH: Never mind, Charles dear, you must move with the times.

CHARLES: I didn't know you thought so highly of the vital spark, anyhow.

SARAH: Of course I do. It's a fundamental instinct in everybody. Being modern only means twisting things into different shapes.

CHARLES (*rising*): The garden looks awfully pretty, doesn't it?

SARAH (*also rising*): Oh, yes, frightfully pretty.

CHARLES (*as they move away*): All those coloured lights and everything—so attractive.

SARAH: Terribly sweet!

CHARLES: It's extraordinary how pretty a garden *can* look.

SARAH: Oh, shut up!

They go off on to the verandah.

FURBER crosses the hall, with a tray of clean glasses. The music stops, and desultory clapping can be heard. Several couples belch out of the dining-room, among them MARION with HENRY FURLEY, an earnest young man with a pinched face and glasses. MARION, for some obscure reason, is in white, with a black Indian scarf speckled with gold, and gold shoes which hurt her a little. They walk across, talking. MARION is being painfully jolly and gay—she slaps PHILIP BORDON heartily on the back in passing.

MARION: We'll have you turned out if you twirl about like that, you know.

PHILIP (*with equal jocularity*): I shan't go quietly.

MARION: I bet you won't.

Several people laugh at this volley of wit, including the perpetrators of it.

(To Mr. FURLEY) Damned good tune that.

FURLEY: Yes, I enjoyed it.

MARION: You lugged me round like a Trojan.

FURLEY (*politely*): Not at all.

MARION: You know some tricky steps—we'd do well on the stage.

FURLEY (*laughing*): Yes, wouldn't we?

MARION: Be a good chap and get me a glass of something—I'm dry as a bone.

FURLEY: Claret-cup?

MARION: Yes, rather. That'll do. I'll wait here. (*She sits down, up-stage, and fans herself with her hand.*)

MR. FURLEY departs in search of claret-cup.

Two YOUNG PEOPLE, who have been sitting on the stairs, rise.

GIRL: You really are awful—I don't believe a word of it.

BOY: It's true—I swear it is.

They both go into the dance-room, where the music has restarted.

MRS. WHITTAKER comes in, wearing a good many brooches on a mauve dress; she also has a diamanté butterfly in her hair. She is accompanied by MRS. HURST, a tall, handsome woman in black.

MRS. WHITTAKER: But you really mustn't—it's quite early yet.

MRS. HURST: I'm just going to slip away without anybody noticing. Sarah can collect our party and come home when she wants to.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Of course, if you're really tired—

MRS. HURST: I'm so sorry your daughter-in-law is so seedy.

MRS. WHITTAKER: It is tiresome, isn't it?—Poor Larita.

MRS. HURST: Tell her how disappointed I was not to have seen her, won't you?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Certainly.

MRS. PHILLIPS, *a pale, white-haired woman, approaches.*

MRS. PHILLIPS (*effusively*): There you are, Mrs. Whittaker! It's all going off most successfully, isn't it?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes; I think the young people seem to be enjoying themselves.

MRS. PHILLIPS: So fortunate that it kept fine.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I've been on absolute tenterhooks all day.

MRS. HURST: I was just saying what a pity poor Mrs. John is missing it all.

MRS. PHILLIPS: I know—it's dreadful. What *is* wrong with her, exactly?

MRS. WHITTAKER: A blinding headache—she has them, you know, quite often. I'm always trying to make her go to a specialist.

MRS. PHILLIPS: Poor dear! It *is* a shame—to-night of all nights.

JOHN comes in with MARY BANFIELD, *a dark girl with whom he has been dancing.*

MRS. WHITTAKER: But still, it's much better, if you do feel ill, to stay quite quiet.

MRS. PHILLIPS: Oh, much, much! Do tell her how sorry I am, won't you?

CHARLES and SARAH wander in from the verandah. MARION has been rejoined by MR. FURLEY, and is sipping her claret-cup. JOHN and MARY BANFIELD sit on the bottom step of the stairs and light cigarettes.

MRS. HURST: Sarah dear, I'm just going to slip away. When you come home, you will remember to lock up and turn out all the lights, won't you?

SARAH (*joining the little group with CHARLES*): All right, mother.

MRS. PHILLIPS: The Chinese lanterns look so pretty, don't they?

CHARLES (*amiably*): Perfectly charming—quite Venetian.

SARAH: Mrs. Whittaker, I'm so sorry about Lari. Do you think I could run up and see her?

MRS. WHITTAKER (*hurriedly*): No, dear, really—she asked particularly to be left alone; you know what these headaches are—

SARAH: Yes, but—

MRS. WHITTAKER: The only thing to do is just rest and keep quiet.

SARAH: Poor darling!

MRS. WHITTAKER: She may have dropped off to sleep by now.

At this moment LARITA appears at the top of the stairs. Her dress is dead-white and cut extremely low; she is wearing three ropes of pearls, and another long string twined round her right wrist. Her face is as white as her dress and her lips vivid scarlet. Her left arm positively glitters with diamond, ruby and emerald bracelets; her small tiara of rubies and diamonds matches her enormous

earrings; she also displays a diamond anklet over her cobweb fine flesh-coloured stocking. She is carrying a tremendous scarlet ostrich feather fan. There is a distinct gasp from everybody. MARION rises and drops her glass of claret-cup.

LARITA (*prodding JOHN with her foot*): Get out of the way, Johnnie darling, or I shall tread on you.

JOHN (*jumping up, aghast*): Lari!

CHARLES (*softly*): Oh, marvellous—marvellous!

MRS. PHILLIPS: Well!

MRS. WHITTAKER (*pulling herself together and advancing*): My dear Larita, this is a surprise.

LARITA (*smiling*): Is it?

MRS. WHITTAKER (*icily*): I'm so glad your headache's better.

LARITA (*relentlessly*): Headache? I haven't had a headache.

MRS. PHILLIPS exchanges meaning looks with MRS. HURST.

LARITA: I've been dressing and doing my face—it always takes me hours.

SARAH (*kissing her*): You look perfectly lovely, Lari, and I'm frightfully glad to see you.

LARITA: I'm dying for something to eat. I didn't feel inclined for any dinner, and now I'm starving.

JOHN (*utterly bewildered*): Lari—how can you!

LARITA: Get me a sandwich, or something, there's a darling. How divine the garden looks.

JOHN: Oh—all right. (*He goes out to buffet.*)

LARITA: Hallo! Charles Burleigh. I hoped you were coming—I haven't seen you for ages.

MRS. PHILLIPS: We were just sending you up messages of sympathy—we understood you were prostrate—

LARITA: So I was—my maid has been massaging me; perfect agony—

MRS. WHITTAKER (*feebly*): Well, anyhow, I'm sure I'm very glad you're better now—and changed your mind about coming down.

LARITA (*lightly*): What an absurd misunderstanding. I intended to come down, all along.

JOHN returns with a sandwich.

LARITA: Thank you, Johnnie. (*She proceeds to eat it with great gusto.*)

MRS. WHITTAKER (*rallying her scattered faculties*): Marion, I'm sure the band ought to be given something to eat and drink—they've been playing for such a long time.

MARION: Righto, mother. I'll see Furber about it. (*She looks at LARITA contemptuously.*)

LARITA: How charming you look, Marion! And what a lovely scarf. I'm sure it came from India.

MARION, *ignoring her, goes out on to the verandah.*

MRS. HURST: I really must be off now. Good-bye, and thank you so much. (*She shakes hands with MRS. WHITTAKER.*)

MRS. PHILLIPS (*looking at LARITA*): I don't think I can tear myself away yet—I must stay a little longer.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Please do. It's so early. (*She walks towards the door with MRS. HURST.*)

LARITA (*to MRS. PHILLIPS*): How is your girl, Rose Jenkins, progressing in London, Mrs. Phillips? You seemed so worried about her when you came to tea last week.

MRS. PHILLIPS: I really don't know—I'm afraid she's a hopelessly bad character.

LARITA: I'm sure she'll get on in the profession you've sent her to.

MRS. PHILLIPS (*stiffly*): I sent her to no profession.

LARITA: How stupid of me! I thought you had.

MRS. PHILLIPS, *sensing underlying meaning, moves away.*

JOHN: Lari, why on earth are you dressed up like this?

LARITA: I just felt like it, Johnnie. I'm wearing all the jewellery I've got in the world—it's a heavenly sensation. (*She jingles her bracelets.*)

JOHN: It looks ridiculous.

LARITA: Don't be an ass, John.

JOHN: But it does—honestly.

LARITA (*brushing him with her fan*): Run away and dance if you can't be pleasant to me.

JOHN: But look here, Lari—

LARITA (*with suppressed fury*): Perhaps you don't realise that I'm serious?

JOHN: Oh, all right—if you're going on like that. (*He slams off in a rage.*)

LARITA: John's lost grip of things terribly lately, hasn't he?

SARAH: Lari dear, what's happened?

LARITA: Lots and lots and lots of things.

SARAH: Are you upset?

LARITA: You don't suppose I should do this—ordinarily—do you?

SARAH: Tell me.

LARITA: Not yet, Sarah—later on.

PHILIP BORDON *rushes up.*

PHILIP: I am glad you're all right.

LARITA: Thank you.

PHILIP: You've cut both the dances you promised me by coming down late.

LARITA: I'm so sorry. Let's have this one.

PHILIP: Rather!

LARITA (*to SARAH*): Later on, dear.

CHARLES: Next dance, please.

LARITA: Missing eight.

CHARLES: No—the next one.

LARITA: All right. (*She goes into the dance-room with PHILIP.*)

CHARLES: You must say she's magnificent.

SARAH: She's wretched.

CHARLES: I've never seen such an entrance in my life.

SARAH (*smiling*): Poor Mrs. Whittaker.

CHARLES: Serve her right.

SARAH: I wonder what Lari's object is—in all this.

CHARLES: Swan song.

SARAH: Charles—what do you mean?

CHARLES: Wait and see.

SARAH: Come and dance, then.

CHARLES: I feel pleasantly thrilled.

SARAH: Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

They go into the dance-room. NINA VANSITTART and HUGH PETWORTH are standing by the dance-room door.

NINA: That's her in white.

HUGH: Phew!

NINA: I've never seen anything like it.

HUGH: Look at her pearls.

NINA: Downright vulgar, I call it.

HUGH: Come on in.

They go in.

MRS. WHITTAKER *intercepts MARION coming from the verandah, and draws her aside.*

FURBER *goes into the dance-room with drinks for the band.*

MRS. WHITTAKER: This is outrageous! How dare she!

MARION: Nothing can be done.

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm so ashamed.

MARION: If I can get her alone I'll give her a piece of my mind.

MRS. WHITTAKER: No, no; ignore her—don't say a word. We don't want a repetition of this afternoon.

MARION: We shall never hear the last of it. Did you see Mrs. Phillips' face?

MRS. WHITTAKER: I'm sure I don't know what I've done to be so humiliated.

MARION (*fearing a breakdown*): Mother—for Heaven's sake—

HILDA rushes in from the dance-room.

HILDA (*frantically*): Mother—Lari's come down! She's dancing!

MARION: Yes, yes, we know.

HILDA: I've been telling everybody she was ill.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Don't speak so loudly, Hilda.

HILDA: She looks a sight. What are we to do?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Nothing. Ignore her completely—behave as if she wasn't there at all, and don't discuss her with anybody.

HILDA: But everybody's talking about her.

MARION: I don't wonder.

HILDA: It's too awful.

FURBER *approaches them.*

FURBER: The sit-down supper's ready in the tent now, ma'am.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Well, tell everybody. You'd better stop the band.

MARION: No, there won't be room if they all troop out. I'll go in and just tell some of them.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Yes, do.

HILDA: I'll come too.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Remember, Hilda—don't be aware of anything unusual at all.

HILDA: All right.

HILDA and MARION *go into the dance-room.*

MRS. WHITTAKER *passes her hand hopelessly across her forehead.*

JOHN *comes in.*

JOHN: Mother—I'm fearfully sorry about this.

MRS. WHITTAKER: Don't, John—don't.

JOHN: But I don't understand—it's so unlike Lari to make an exhibition of herself like this.

MRS. WHITTAKER (*bitterly*): Unlike her!

JOHN: Something's happened. What is it?

MRS. WHITTAKER: Don't worry me now, John; can't you see I'm at my wits' end?

JOHN: I mean to find out.

Several people come in, among them SARAH and CHARLES.

MRS. WHITTAKER *goes out to the supper-tent.*

SARAH (*lightly*): Don't look so gloomy, John.

JOHN: Something's happened to Lari—what is it?

SARAH: She's dancing at the moment with Philip Bordon.

JOHN: Why did she pretend to have a headache, and not come down to dinner or anything?

SARAH: She didn't feel like it, I suppose.

JOHN: I'm going to find out what's wrong.

SARAH (*taking his arm*): No, you're not; you're going to give me some supper. Come along, or there won't be any room.

JOHN: But, Sarah——

SARAH: Come along.

She drags him off, throwing a meaning look at CHARLES over her shoulder. CHARLES nods, and lights a cigarette.

BOBBY COLEMAN walks across with a GIRL.

BOBBY: I think she looks jolly attractive.

GIRL: Fancy all those bracelets, though!

They go off.

LARITA comes in with PHILIP, followed at a discreet distance by HILDA, scowling malignantly.

LARITA: No—I couldn't eat a thing at the moment. If I'd known supper was so close I should never have had that sandwich. (*She sits down on sofa.*)

PHILIP: Can I get you anything to drink?

LARITA: No, thanks—nothing. Go and have supper with poor little Hilda, and we'll dance again afterwards.

PHILIP: But, I say——

LARITA: Please! I want to rest for a minute.

PHILIP: Oh, very well.

HILDA marches out, with her head in the air. PHILIP follows despondently.

LARITA (*to CHARLES*): Come and talk to me.

CHARLES: I've been wanting to do that.

LARITA: How sweet of you. Where's Sarah?

CHARLES: With John—having supper.

LARITA: Oh! (*She opens her cigarette-case and offers him one.*)

CHARLES: Thanks. (*He lights hers and his own.*)

LARITA: Such a good floor, don't you think?

CHARLES: Perfectly awful.

LARITA: I wonder if your attention has been called to those fascinating Japanese lanterns?

CHARLES: Several times.

LARITA: You must admit it's a fine night, anyhow.

CHARLES: How you've changed.

LARITA: Changed?

CHARLES: Yes. Meeting you just now and then, as I've done, makes it easier to observe subtle differences.

LARITA: In what way have I changed?

CHARLES: You're dimmer.

LARITA: Dimmer!—with all these? (*She jingles her bracelets.*)

CHARLES: Yes, even with those.

LARITA: You wouldn't have thought me dim if you'd seen me this afternoon.

CHARLES: Why, what happened?

LARITA: Several things.

CHARLES: I don't want you to think I'm angling for your confidence, but I am interested.

LARITA: I know that. It's interesting enough. Do you remember saying, the first day I met you, that one was disillusioned over everything?

CHARLES: You've been disillusioned lately?

LARITA: Yes—I didn't know I was capable of it.

CHARLES: That's one of the great illusions of all.

LARITA: You've been awfully nice to me.

CHARLES: Why not? We speak the same language.

LARITA: Yes—I suppose we do.

CHARLES: And naturally one feels instinctively drawn—particularly in this atmosphere.

LARITA: English country life. (*She smiles.*)

CHARLES: Yes, English country life.

LARITA: I wonder if it's a handicap having our sort of minds?

CHARLES: In what way?

LARITA: Watching ourselves go by.

CHARLES: No, it's a comfort in the end.

LARITA: I'm face to face with myself all the time—specially when I'm unhappy. It's not an edifying sensation.

CHARLES: I'm sorry you're unhappy.

LARITA: It can't be helped—you can't cope adequately with your successes unless you realise your failures.

CHARLES: It requires courage to do either.

LARITA: I've always had a definite ideal.

CHARLES: What is it?

LARITA: One should be top-dog in one's own particular sphere.

CHARLES: It's so difficult to find out what *is* one's own particular sphere.

LARITA: I'm afraid that's always been depressingly obvious to me.

CHARLES: You feel you've deviated from your course?

LARITA: Exactly—and it's demoralised me.

CHARLES: Why did you do it?

LARITA: Panic, I believe.

CHARLES: What sort of panic?

LARITA: A panic of restlessness and dissatisfaction with everything.

CHARLES: That's a black cloud which descends upon everyone at moments.

LARITA: Not everyone—just people like us.

CHARLES: When you live emotionally you must expect the pendulum to swing both ways.

LARITA: It had swung the wrong way with a vengeance when I met John. Marrying him was the most cowardly thing I ever did.

CHARLES: Why did you?

LARITA: I loved him quite differently. I thought that any other relationship would be cheapening and squalid—I can't imagine how I could have been such a fool.

CHARLES: Neither can I.

LARITA: Love will always be the most dominant and absorbing subject in the world because it's so utterly inexplicable. Experience can teach you to handle it superficially, but not to explain it. I can look round with a nice clear brain and see absolutely no reason why I should love John. He falls short of every ideal I've ever had—he's not particularly talented or clever; he doesn't *know* anything really; he can't talk about any of the things I consider it worth while to talk about; and, having been to a good school—he's barely educated.

CHARLES: Just a healthy young animal.

LARITA: Yes.

CHARLES: Perhaps that explains it.

LARITA: If my love were entirely physical, it would; but it isn't physical at all.

CHARLES: That *is* a bad sign.

LARITA: The worst.

CHARLES: What do you intend to do?

LARITA: I haven't decided yet.

CHARLES: I think I know.

LARITA: Don't say that.

CHARLES: Very well; I'll tell you afterwards if I guessed right.

LARITA: Go, and send Sarah to me—alone; will you?

CHARLES (*rising*): All right.

LARITA (*putting out her hand*): We shall meet again, perhaps some day.

CHARLES: I *was* right.

LARITA (*putting her finger to her lips*): Sshhh!

CHARLES goes out.

People have passed backwards and forwards during this scene, talking and laughing. Now the hall is practically deserted. HUGH PETWORTH and BOBBY COLEMAN appear on the verandah. Seeing LARITA alone, they whisper and nudge each other. Finally HUGH comes in.

HUGH: I say, Mrs. John, will you dance?

LARITA: No, thank you—I'm rather tired.

HUGH: It's a jolly good band.

LARITA: Do you know, I don't believe I've ever met you before.

HUGH: Well, as a matter of fact, we haven't been introduced officially. My name's Hugh Petworth.

LARITA: Really. How much would you have won from your little friend if I had agreed to dance with you?

HUGH (*flummoxed*): Here, I say, you know,—I—

LARITA: You're far too young and nice-looking to be so impertinent. If I were you, I should run away and recover yourself.

HUGH (*blushing*): I'm awfully sorry.

LARITA: Don't apologise—it's quite all right.

HUGH PETWORTH bows awkwardly, and goes hurriedly out to rejoin BOBBY, who has disappeared. He cannons into SARAH, who is coming in.

HUGH: I beg your pardon.

SARAH: Not at all. Hullo! Lari.

LARITA: I want to talk to you, Sarah—importantly. There isn't much time.

SARAH: Why? What do you mean?

LARITA: I'm going away—to-night.

SARAH: Lari!

LARITA: For good.

SARAH: Oh, my dear!—what on earth's the matter?

LARITA: Everything. Where's John?

SARAH: In the supper-tent.

LARITA: Listen. There was a dreary family fracas this afternoon.

SARAH: What about?

LARITA: Hilda had unearthed a newspaper cutting, disclosing several of my past misdemeanours—

SARAH: The unutterable little beast! I made her swear

LARITA: You knew about it?

SARAH: Yes, she showed it to me three days ago.

LARITA (*slightly overcome*): Oh, Sarah!—

SARAH: I said I'd never speak to her again if she showed it to anybody, and I shan't.

LARITA: It was all very unpleasant. The Colonel stood by me, of course—John wasn't there—he doesn't know anything yet.

SARAH: But Lari dear, don't give in like this and chuck up everything.

LARITA: I must—you see, they're right; it's perfectly horrible for them. I'm entirely to blame.

SARAH: But what does it matter? The past's finished with.

LARITA: Never. Never, never, never. That's a hopeless fallacy.

SARAH: I'm most frightfully sorry.

LARITA: I wouldn't give in at all—unless I was sure. You see, John's completely sick of me—it was just silly calf-love, and I ought to have recognised it as such. But I was utterly carried away—and now it's all such a hopeless mess.

SARAH: John's behaved abominably.

LARITA: No—not really. I expected too much. When you love anybody, you build in your mind an ideal of them—and it's naturally terribly hard for them to play up, not knowing—

SARAH: But, Lari, don't do anything on the impulse of the moment.

LARITA: It isn't the impulse of the moment—I realised it weeks ago.

SARAH: It may all come right yet.

LARITA: Be honest, Sarah—how can it?

SARAH: Where are you going?

LARITA: London to-night, and Paris to-morrow. I've ordered a car. Louise is packing now.

SARAH: Where will you stay?

LARITA: The Ritz. I always do.

SARAH: I wish I could do something.

LARITA (*pressing her hand*): You can.

SARAH: What?

LARITA: Look after John for me.

SARAH (*turning away*): Don't, Lari.

LARITA: I mean it. You're fond of him—you ought to have married him, by rights. He needs you so much more than me. He's frightfully weak, and a complete damn fool over most things, but he has got qualities—somewhere—worth bringing out. I'm going to arrange for him to divorce me, quietly, without any fuss.

SARAH: I don't love him nearly as well as you do.

LARITA: All the better. Women of my type are so tiresome in love. We hammer at it, tooth and nail, until it's all bent and misshapen. Promise me you'll do what I ask.

SARAH: I can't promise; but if circumstances make it possible, I'll try.

LARITA: All right—that'll do.

SARAH: Shall I see you again—ever?

LARITA: Yes, please.

SARAH: Well, we won't say good-bye, then.

LARITA: It's such a silly thing to say. (*She gets up.*)

SARAH: Good luck, anyhow.

LARITA: I'm not sure that that's not sillier.

JOHN *comes in.*

JOHN: Sarah, I've been looking for you everywhere.

SARAH: Well, you've found me now.

JOHN: Lari, I'm sorry I was beastly just now—about your dress. You are rather a Christmas tree, though, aren't you?

LARITA: It was done with a purpose.

JOHN: What purpose?

LARITA: It was a sort of effort to re-establish myself—rather a gay gesture—almost a joke!

JOHN: Oh!

SARAH: You'll find me in the garden, John.

LARITA (*quickly*): Don't go, Sarah—please.

SARAH *stops*.

I'm rather tired, so I'll say good night.

JOHN: The dance will go on for hours yet—this is only a lull.

LARITA: Yes, I know; but I'm dead.

JOHN: Oh, very well.

LARITA: Good night, darling. (*She kisses him.*)

JOHN: I'll try not to disturb you.

LARITA: I'm afraid you won't be able to help it.

SARAH: Come and dance, John.

JOHN: What's the matter, Lari? Why are you looking like that?

LARITA: I think I'm going to sneeze.

BOBBY and COLEMAN and NINA rush across, laughing; he's delving into her bag and she's trying to recapture it.

JOHN and SARAH go into the dance-room.

FURBER enters from verandah.

LARITA: Is the car ready, Furber?

FURBER: Yes, ma'am. Your maid is waiting in it.

LARITA: Get my cloak from her, will you, please?

FURBER: Very good, ma'am. (*He goes off.*)

LARITA, left quite alone, leans up against one of the windows and looks out into the garden. The light from the lanterns falls on her face, which is set in an expression of hopeless sadness. She fans herself once, then lets her fan drop.

FURBER re-enters with her cloak, and helps her on with it.

LARITA: Thank you very much, Furber. You won't forget what I asked you, will you?

FURBER: No, ma'am.

LARITA: Then good-bye.

FURBER: Good-bye, ma'am.

He holds open the door for her, and she walks out. There is a burst of laughter from the verandah. The band continues to play with great enthusiasm.

CURTAIN

HAY FEVER

TO
LORN LORAINÉ

CHARACTERS

JUDITH BLISS
DAVID BLISS
SOREL BLISS
SIMON BLISS
MYRA ARUNDEL
RICHARD GREATHAM
JACKIE CORYTON
SANDY TYRELL
CLARA

The action of the play takes place in the hall of the BLISSES' house at Cookham, in June.

Act I: Saturday afternoon.

Act II: Saturday evening.

Act III: Sunday morning.

ACT I

SCENE: *The hall of DAVID BLISS's house is very comfortable and extremely untidy. There are several of SIMON's cartoons scattered about the walls, masses of highly coloured American and classical music strewn about the piano, and lots of flowers and comfortable furniture. A staircase ascends to a small balcony leading to the bedrooms, DAVID's study and SIMON's room. There is a door leading to the library down R. A service door above it under the stairs. There are French windows at back, and the front door on the L.*

When the curtain rises it is about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in June.

SIMON, in an extremely dirty tennis shirt and baggy grey flannel trousers, is crouched in the middle of the floor, cutting out squares from cartridge paper.

SOREL, more neatly dressed, is stretched on the sofa reading a very violently bound volume of poems which have been sent to her by an aspiring friend.

SOREL: Listen to this, Simon. (*She reads.*) "Love's a Trollop stained with wine—Clawing at the breasts of Adolescence—Nuzzling, tearing, shrieking, beating—God, why were we fashioned so!" (*She laughs.*)

SIMON: The poor girl's potty.

SOREL: I wish she hadn't sent me the beastly book. I must say something nice about it.

SIMON: The binding's very dashing.

SOREL: She used to be such fun before she married that gloomy little man.

SIMON: She was always a fierce *poseuse*. It's so silly of people to try and cultivate the artistic temperament. *Au fond* she's just a normal, bouncing Englishwoman.

SOREL: You didn't shave this morning.

SIMON: I know I didn't, but I'm going to in a minute, when I've finished this.

SOREL: I sometimes wish we were more normal and bouncing, Simon.

SIMON: Why?

SOREL: I should like to be a fresh, open-air girl with a passion for games.

SIMON: Thank God you're not.

SOREL: It would be so soothing.

SIMON: Not in this house.

SOREL: Where's Mother?

SIMON: In the garden, practising.

SOREL: Practising?

SIMON: She's learning the names of the flowers by heart.

SOREL: What's she up to?

SIMON: I don't know.—Damn! that's crooked.

SOREL: I always distrust her when she becomes the Squire's lady.

SIMON: So do I.

SOREL: She's been at it hard all day—she tapped the barometer this morning.

SIMON: She's probably got a plan about impressing somebody.

SOREL (*taking a cigarette*): I wonder who.

SIMON: Some dreary, infatuated young man will appear soon, I expect.

SOREL: Not to-day? You don't think she's asked anyone down to-day, do you?

SIMON: I don't know. Has Father noticed anything?

SOREL: No; he's too immersed in work.

SIMON: Perhaps Clara will know.

SOREL: Yell for her.

SIMON (*calling*): Clara! Clara! . . .

SOREL: Oh, Simon, I *do* hope she hasn't asked anyone down to-day.

SIMON: Why? Have you?

SOREL: Yes.

SIMON (*crossly*): Why on earth didn't you tell me?

SOREL: I didn't think you'd care one way or another.

SIMON: Who is it?

SOREL: Richard Greatham.

SIMON: How exciting! I've never heard of him.

SOREL: I shouldn't flaunt your ignorance if I were you—it makes you look silly.

SIMON (*rising*): Well, that's done. (*He rolls up the cartridge paper.*)

SOREL: Everybody's heard of Richard Greatham.

SIMON (*amiably*): How lovely for them.

SOREL: He's a frightfully well-known diplomatist—I met him at the Mainwarings' dance.

SIMON: He'll need all his diplomacy here.

SOREL: I warned him not to expect good manners, but I hope you'll be as pleasant to him as you can.

SIMON (*gently*): I've never met any diplomats, Sorel,

but as a class I'm extremely prejudiced against them. They're so suave and polished and debonair.

SOREL: You could be a little more polished without losing caste.

SIMON: Will he have the papers with him?

SOREL: What papers?

SIMON (*vaguely*): Oh, any papers.

SOREL: I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON: And I wish you'd confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenceless family.

SOREL: I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

SIMON: Do, darling.

Enter CLARA. She is a hot, round, untidy little woman.

SIMON: Clara, has Mother asked anyone down this week-end?

CLARA: I don't know, dear. There isn't much food in the house, and Amy's got toothache.

SOREL: I've got some oil of cloves somewhere.

CLARA: She tried that, but it only burnt her tongue. The poor girl's been writhing about in the scullery like one o'clock.

SOREL: You haven't forgotten to put those flowers in the Japanese room?

SIMON: The Japanese room is essentially feminine, and entirely unsuited to the Pet of the Foreign Office.

SOREL: Shut up, Simon.

CLARA: The room looks lovely, dear—you needn't

worry. Just like your mother's dressing-room on a first night.

SIMON: How restful!

CLARA (*to SOREL*): Have you told her about your boy friend?

SOREL (*pained*): Not boy friend, Clara.

CLARA (*going round, picking up things*): Oh, well, whatever he is.

SIMON: I think Sorel's beginning to be ashamed of us all, Clara—I don't altogether blame her; we are very slapdash.

CLARA: Are you going to leave that picture in the guests' bathroom, dear? I don't know if it's quite the thing—lots of pink, naked women rolling about in a field.

SIMON (*severely*): Nudity can be very beautiful, Clara.

CLARA: Oh, can it! Perhaps being a dresser for so long 'as spoilt me eye for it. (*She goes out.*)

SIMON: Clara's looking tired. We ought to have more servants and not depend on her so much.

SOREL: You know we can never keep them. You're right about us being slapdash, Simon. I wish we weren't.

SIMON: Does it matter?

SOREL: It must, I think—to other people.

SIMON: It's not our fault—it's the way we've been brought up.

SOREL: Well, if we're clever enough to realise that, we ought to be clever enough to change ourselves.

SIMON: I'm not sure that I want to.

SOREL: We're so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON: Not to people we like.

SOREL: The people we like put up with it because they like us.

SIMON: What do you mean, exactly, by bad manners? Lack of social tricks and small-talk?

SOREL: We never attempt to look after people when they come here.

SIMON: Why should we? It's loathsome being looked after.

SOREL: Yes, but people like little attentions. We've never once asked anyone if they've slept well.

SIMON: I consider that an impertinence, anyhow.

SOREL: I'm going to try to improve.

SIMON: You're only going on like this because you've got a mania for a diplomatist. You'll soon return to normal.

* SOREL (*earnestly*): Abnormal, Simon—that's what we are. Abnormal. People stare in astonishment when we say what we consider perfectly ordinary things. I just remarked at Freda's lunch the other day how nice it would be if someone invented something to make all our faces go up like the Chinese, because I was so bored with them going down—and they all thought I was mad!

SIMON: It's no use worrying, darling; we see things differently, I suppose, and if people don't like it they must lump it.

SOREL: Mother's been awfully restless lately.

SIMON: Yes, I know.

SOREL: Life must be terribly dull for her now, with nothing to do.

SIMON: She'll go back soon, I expect; people never retire from the stage for long.

SOREL: Father will be livid if she does.

SIMON: That won't matter.

Enter JUDITH from the garden. She is carrying an armful of flowers and wearing a tea-gown, a large garden hat, gauntlet gloves and goloshes.

JUDITH: You look awfully dirty, Simon. What have you been doing?

SIMON (*nonchalantly*): Not washing very much.

JUDITH: You should, darling, really. It's so bad for your skin to leave things about on it. (*She proceeds to take off her goloshes.*)

SOREL: Clara says Amy's got toothache.

JUDITH: Poor dear! There's some oil of cloves in my medicine cupboard. Who is Amy?

SOREL: The scullery-maid, I think.

JUDITH: How extraordinary! She doesn't look Amy a bit, does she? Much more Flossie.—Give me a cigarette.

SOREL gives her a cigarette and lights it.

Delphinums are those stubby red flowers, aren't they?

SIMON: No, darling, they're tall and blue.

JUDITH: Yes, of course. The red ones are somebody's name—Asters, that's it. I knew it was something opulent. I do hope Clara has remembered about the Japanese room.

SOREL: Japanese room!

JUDITH: Yes; I told her to put some flowers in it and take Simon's flannels out of the wardrobe drawer.

SOREL: So did I.

JUDITH (*ominously*): Why?

SOREL (*airily*): I've asked Richard Greatham down for the week-end—I didn't think you'd mind.

JUDITH: Mind! How dared you do such a thing?

SOREL: He's a diplomatist.

JUDITH: That makes it much worse. We must wire and put him off at once.

SOREL: It's too late.

JUDITH: Well, we'll tell Clara to say we've been called away.

SOREL: That would be extremely rude, and, anyhow, I want to see him.

JUDITH: You mean to stand there in cold blood and tell me you've asked a complete stranger down for the weekend, and that you want to see him!

SOREL: I've often done it before.

JUDITH: I fail to see how that helps matters. Where's he going to sleep?

SOREL: The Japanese room.

JUDITH: Oh, no, he isn't—Sandy Tyrell is sleeping in it.

SIMON: There now! What did I tell you?

SOREL: Sandy—what?

JUDITH: Tyrell, dear.

SIMON: Why didn't you tell us, Mother?

JUDITH: I did. I've talked of nothing but Sandy Tyrell for days. I adore Sandy Tyrell.

SIMON: You've never mentioned him.

SOREL: Who is he, Mother?

JUDITH: He's a perfect darling, and madly in love with me—at least, it isn't me really, it's my Celebrated Actress glamour—but it gives me a divinely cosy feeling. I met him at Nora Trent's.

SOREL: Mother, I wish you'd give up this sort of thing.

JUDITH: What exactly do you mean by "this sort of thing," Sorel?

SOREL: You know perfectly well what I mean.

JUDITH: Are you attempting to criticise me?

SOREL: I should have thought you'd be above encouraging silly callow young men who are infatuated by your name.

JUDITH: That may be true, but I shall allow nobody but myself to say it. I hoped you'd grow up a good daughter to me, not a critical aunt.

SOREL: It's so terribly cheap.

JUDITH: Cheap! Nonsense! What about your diplomatist?

SOREL: Surely that's a little different, dear?

JUDITH: If you mean that because you happen to be a vigorous *ingenue* of nineteen you have the complete monopoly of any amorous adventure there may be about, I feel it my firm duty to disillusion you.

SOREL: But, Mother——

JUDITH: Anyone would think I was eighty, the way you go on. It was a great mistake not sending you to boarding schools, and you coming back and me being your elder sister.

SIMON: It wouldn't have been any use. Everyone knows we're your son and daughter.

JUDITH: Only because I was stupid enough to dandle you about in front of cameras when you were little. I knew I should regret it.

SIMON: I don't see any point in trying to be younger than you are.

JUDITH: At your age, dear, it would be indecent if you did.

SOREL: But, Mother darling, don't you see, it's awfully

undignified for you to go flaunting about with young men?

JUDITH: I don't flaunt about—I never have. I've been morally an extremely nice woman all my life—more or less—and if dabbling gives me pleasure, I don't see why I shouldn't dabble.

SOREL: But it oughtn't to give you pleasure any more.

JUDITH: You know, Sorel, you grow more damnably feminine every day. I wish I'd brought you up differently!

SOREL: I'm proud of being feminine.

JUDITH (*kissing her*): You're a darling, and I adore you; and you're very pretty, and I'm madly jealous of you.

SOREL (*with her arms round her*): Are you really? How lovely.

JUDITH: You will be nice to Sandy, won't you?

SOREL (*breaking away*): Can't he sleep in "Little Hell"?

JUDITH: My dear, he's frightfully athletic, and all those hot-water pipes will sap his vitality.

SOREL: They'll sap Richard's vitality too.

JUDITH: He won't notice them; he's probably used to scorching tropical Embassies with punkahs waving and everything.

SIMON: He's sure to be deadly, anyhow.

SOREL: You're getting far too blasé and exclusive, Simon.

SIMON: Nothing of the sort. Only I loathe being hearty with your men friends.

SOREL: You've never been even civil to any of my friends, men or women.

JUDITH: Don't bicker.

SIMON: Anyhow, the Japanese room's a woman's room, and a woman ought to have it.

JUDITH: I promised it to Sandy—he loves anything Japanese.

SIMON: So does Myra.

JUDITH: Myra!

SIMON: Myra Arundel. I've asked her down.

JUDITH: You've—what?

SIMON: I've asked Myra down for the week-end—she's awfully amusing.

SOREL: Well, all I can say is, it's beastly of you. You might have warned me. What on earth will Richard say?

SIMON: Something exquisitely non-committal, I expect.

JUDITH: This is too much! Do you mean to tell me, Simon——

SIMON (*firmly*): Yes, Mother, I do. I've asked Myra down, and I have a perfect right to. You've always brought us up to be free about things.

JUDITH: Myra Arundel is straining freedom to its utmost limits.

SIMON: Don't you like her?

JUDITH: No, dear, I detest her. She's far too old for you, and she goes about using Sex as a sort of shrimping net.

SIMON: Really, Mother——!

JUDITH: It's no use being cross. You know perfectly well I dislike her, and that's why you never told me she was coming until too late to stop her. It's intolerable of you.

SOREL (*grandly*): Whether she's here or not is a matter of extreme indifference to me, but I'm afraid Richard won't like her very much.

SIMON: You're afraid he'll like her too much.

SOREL: That was an offensive remark, Simon, and rather silly.

JUDITH (*plaintively*): Why on earth don't you fall in love with nice young girls, instead of self-conscious vampires?

SIMON: She's not a vampire, and I never said I was in love with her.

SOREL: He's crazy about her. She butters him up and admires his sketches.

SIMON: What about you picking up old gentlemen at dances?

SOREL (*furiously*): He's *not* old!

JUDITH: You've both upset me thoroughly. I wanted a nice, restful week-end, with moments of Sandy's ingenuous affection to warm the cockles of my heart when I felt in the mood, and now the house is going to be full of discord—not enough good, everyone fighting for the bath—perfect agony! I wish I were dead!

SIMON: You needn't worry about Myra and me. We shall keep out of everyone's way.

SOREL: I shall take Richard on the river all day tomorrow.

JUDITH: In what?

SOREL: The punt.

JUDITH: I absolutely forbid you to go near the punt.

SIMON: It's sure to rain, anyhow.

JUDITH: What your father will say I tremble to think. He needs complete quiet to finish off "The Sinful Woman."

SOREL: I see no reason for there to be any noise, unless Sandy What's-his-name is given to shouting.

JUDITH: If you're rude to Sandy I shall be extremely angry.

SOREL: { Now, look here, Mother——

SIMON: { Why you should expect——

JUDITH: He's coming all the way down specially to be nice to me——

Enter DAVID down stairs. He looks slightly irritable.

DAVID: Why are you all making such a noise?

JUDITH: I think I'm going mad.

DAVID: Why hasn't Clara brought me my tea?

JUDITH: I don't know.

DAVID: Where is Clara?

JUDITH: Do stop firing questions at me, David.

DAVID: Why are you all so irritable? What's happened?

Enter CLARA, with a tray of tea for one.

CLARA: Here's your tea. I'm sorry I'm late with it. Amy forgot to put the kettle on—she's got terrible toothache.

DAVID: Poor girl! Give her some oil of cloves.

SOREL: If anyone else mentions oil of cloves, I shall do something desperate.

DAVID: It's wonderful stuff. Where's Zoe?

SIMON: She was in the garden this morning.

DAVID: I suppose no one thought of giving her any lunch?

CLARA: I put it down by the kitchen table as usual, but she never came in for it.

SOREL: She's probably mousing.

DAVID: She isn't old enough yet. She might have fallen into the river, for all you care. I think it's a shame!

CLARA: Don't you worry your head—Zoe won't come to any harm; she's too wily.

DAVID: I don't want to be disturbed. (*He takes his tray and goes upstairs; then he turns.*) Listen, Simon. There's a perfectly sweet flapper coming down by the four-thirty. Will you go and meet her and be nice to her? She's an abject fool, but a useful type, and I want to study her a little in domestic surroundings. She can sleep in the Japanese room.

He goes off, leaving behind him a deathly silence.

JUDITH: I should like someone to play something very beautiful to me on the piano.

SIMON: Damn everything! Damn! Damn! Damn!

SOREL: Swearing doesn't help.

SIMON: It helps me a lot.

SOREL: What does Father mean by going on like that?

JUDITH: In view of the imminent reception, you'd better go and shave, Simon.

SOREL (*bursting into tears of rage*): It's perfectly beastly! Whenever I make any sort of plan about anything it's always done in by someone. I wish I were earning my own living somewhere—a free agent—able to do whatever I liked without being cluttered up and frustrated by the family—

JUDITH (*picturesquely*): It grieves me to hear you say that, Sorel.

SOREL: Don't be infuriating, Mother.

JUDITH (*sadly*): A change has come over my children of late. I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but in vain. At my time of life one must face bitter facts!

SIMON: This is going to be the blackest Saturday till Monday we've ever spent.

JUDITH (*tenderly*): Sorel, you mustn't cry.

SOREL: Don't sympathise with me; it's only temper.

JUDITH (*clasping her*): Put your head on my shoulder, dear.

SIMON (*bitterly*): Your head like the golden fleece. . . .

SOREL: Richard'll have to have "Little Hell" and that horrible flapper the Japanese room.

JUDITH: Over my dead body!

SIMON: Mother, what *are* we to do?

JUDITH (*drawing him forcibly into her arms so that there is a charming little motherly picture*): We must all be very, very kind to everyone!

SIMON: Now then, Mother, none of that!

JUDITH (*aggrieved*): I don't know what you mean, Simon.

SIMON: You were being beautiful and sad.

JUDITH: But I am beautiful and sad.

SIMON: You're not particularly beautiful, darling, and you never were.

JUDITH (*glancing at herself in the glass*): Never mind; I made thousands think I was.

SIMON: And as for being sad—

JUDITH: Now, Simon, I will not be dictated to like this. If I say I'm sad, I *am* sad. You don't understand, because you're precocious and tiresome. . . . There comes a time in all women's lives—

SOREL: Oh dear!

JUDITH: What did you say, Sorel?

SOREL (*recovering*): I said, "Oh dear!"

JUDITH: Well, please don't say it again, because it annoys me.

SOREL: You're such a lovely hypocrite.

JUDITH (*casting up her eyes*): I'm sure I don't know

what I've done to be cursed with such ungrateful children.
It's very cruel at my time of life—

SIMON: There you go again!

JUDITH (*inconsequently*): You're getting far too tall,
Sorel.

SOREL: Sorry, Mother.

JUDITH: Give me another of those disgusting cigarettes
—I don't know where they came from.

SIMON (*giving her one*): Here. (*He lights it for her.*)

JUDITH: I'm going to forget entirely about all these
dreadful people arriving. My mind henceforward shall be
a blank on the subject.

SOREL: It's all very fine, Mother, but—

JUDITH: I made a great decision this morning.

SIMON: What kind of decision?

JUDITH: It's a secret.

SOREL: Aren't you going to tell us?

JUDITH: Of course. I meant it was a secret from your
Father.

SIMON: What is it?

JUDITH: I'm going back to the stage.

SIMON: I knew it!

JUDITH: I'm stagnating, you see. I won't stagnate as
long as there's breath left in my body.

SOREL: Do you think it's wise? You retired so very
finally last year. What excuse will you give for returning so
soon?

JUDITH: My public, dear—letters from my public!

SIMON: Have you had any?

JUDITH: One or two. That's what decided me, really—
I ought to have had hundreds.

SOREL: We'll write some lovely ones, and you can publish them in the papers.

JUDITH: Of course.

SOREL: You will be dignified about it all, won't you, darling?

JUDITH: I'm much more dignified on the stage than in the country—it's my *milieu*. I've tried terribly hard to be "landed gentry," but without any real success. I long for excitement and glamour. Think of the thrill of a first night; all those ardent playgoers willing one to succeed; the critics all leaning forward with glowing faces, receptive and exultant—emitting queer little inarticulate noises as some witty line tickles their fancy. The satisfied grunt of the *Daily Mail*, the abandoned gurgle of the *Sunday Times*, and the shrill, enthusiastic scream of the *Daily Express*! I can distinguish them all—

SIMON: Have you got a play?

JUDITH: I think I shall revive "Love's Whirlwind."

SOREL (*collapsing on to sofa*): Oh, Mother! (*She gurgles with laughter.*)

SIMON (*weakly*): Father will be furious.

JUDITH: I can't help that.

SOREL: It's such a fearful play.

JUDITH: It's a marvellous part. You mustn't say too much against it, Sorel. I'm willing to laugh at it a little myself, but, after all, it *was* one of my greatest successes.

SIMON: Oh, it's appalling—but I love it. It makes me laugh.

JUDITH: The public love it too, and it doesn't make them laugh—much. (*She recites*) "You are a fool, a blind, pitiable fool. You think because you have bought my body

that you have bought my soul!" You must say that's dramatic.—"I've dreamed of love like this, but I never realised, I never knew how beautiful it could be in reality!" That line always brought a tear to my eye.

SIMON: The Second Act *is* the best, there's no doubt about that.

JUDITH: From the moment Victor comes in it's strong—tremendously strong. . . . Be Victor a minute, Sorel—

SOREL: Do you mean when he comes in at the end of the act?

JUDITH: Yes, you know—"Is this a game?"

SOREL (*with feeling*): "Is this a game?"

JUDITH (*with spirit*): "Yes—and a game that must be played to the finish."

SIMON: "Zara, what does this mean?"

JUDITH: "So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust!"

SOREL: I'm George now—"I don't understand! You and Victor—My God!"

JUDITH: "Ssh! Isn't that little Pam crying?"

SIMON (*savagely*): "She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realises her mother is a ——"

JUDITH (*shrieking*): "Don't say it—don't say it!"

SOREL: "Spare her that."

JUDITH: "I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you that it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute Society. You have ruined my life—I have nothing left—nothing. God in heaven, where am I to turn for help. . . ."

SOREL (*through clenched teeth*): "Is this true? Answer me—is this true?"

JUDITH (*wailing*): "Yes, yes!"

SOREL (*springing at SIMON*): "You cur!"

The front door bell rings.

JUDITH: Damn! There's the bell.

SOREL (*rushing to the glass*): I look hideous!

SIMON: Yes, dear.

CLARA *enters.*

JUDITH: Clara—before you open the door—we shall be eight for dinner.

CLARA: My God!

SIMON: And for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner tomorrow.

JUDITH (*vaguely*): Will you get various rooms ready?

CLARA: I shall have to—they can't sleep in the passage.

SOREL: How we've upset Clara.

JUDITH: It can't be helped—nothing can be helped. It's Fate—everything that happens is Fate. That's always a great comfort to me.

CLARA: More like arrant selfishness.

JUDITH: You mustn't be pert, Clara.

CLARA: Pert I may be, but I 'ave got some thought for others. Eight for dinner—Amy going home early. It's more nor less than an imposition.

The bell rings again.

SIMON: Hadn't you better let them all in?

CLARA *goes to the front door and admits SANDY TYRELL, who is a fresh-looking young man; he has an unspoilt, youthful sense of honour and rather big hands,*

owing to a misplaced enthusiasm for amateur boxing.

CLARA goes out.

SANDY (*to JUDITH*): I say, it's perfectly ripping of you to let me come down.

JUDITH: Are you alone?

SANDY (*surprised*): Yes.

JUDITH: I mean, you didn't meet anyone at the station?

SANDY: I motored down; my car's outside. Would you like me to meet anybody?

JUDITH: Oh, no. I must introduce you. This is my daughter Sorel, and my son Simon.

SANDY (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do.

SOREL (*coldly*): I'm extremely well, thank you, and I hope you are.

SIMON: So do I.

They both go upstairs rather grandly. SANDY looks shattered.

JUDITH: You must forgive me for having rather peculiar children. Have you got a bag or anything?

SANDY: Yes; it's in the car.

JUDITH: We'd better leave it there for the moment, as Clara has to get the tea. We'll find you a room afterwards.

SANDY: I've been looking forward to this most awfully.

JUDITH: It is nice, isn't it? You can see as far as Marlow on a clear day, they tell me.

SANDY: I meant I've been looking forward to seeing you.

JUDITH: How perfectly sweet of you. Would you like a drink?

SANDY: No thanks. I'm in training.

JUDITH (*sitting on sofa and motioning him to sit beside her*): How lovely. What for?

SANDY: I'm boxing again in a couple of weeks.

JUDITH: I must come to your first night.

SANDY: You look simply splendid.

JUDITH: I'm so glad. You know, you mustn't mind if Simon and Sorel insult you a little—they've been very bad-tempered lately.

SANDY: It's awfully funny you having a grown-up son and daughter at all. I can hardly believe it.

JUDITH (*quickly*): I was married very young.

SANDY: I don't wonder. You know, it's frightfully queer the way I've been planning to know you for ages, and I never did until last week.

JUDITH: I liked you from the first, really, because you're such a nice shape.

SANDY (*slightly embarrassed*): Oh, I see . . .

JUDITH: Small hips and lovely long legs—I wish Simon had smaller hips. Do you think you could teach him to box?

SANDY: Rather—if he likes.

JUDITH: That's just the trouble—I'm afraid he won't like. He's so dreadfully un—— that sort of thing. But never mind; you must use your influence subtly. I'm sure David would be pleased.

SANDY: Who's David?

JUDITH: My husband.

SANDY (*surprised*): Oh!

JUDITH: Why do you say "Oh" like that? Didn't you know I had a husband?

SANDY: I thought he was dead.

JUDITH: No, he's not dead; he's upstairs.

SANDY: You're quite different from what you were the other day.

JUDITH: It's this garden hat—I'll take it off. (*She does so.*) There. I've been pruning the calceolarias.

SANDY (*puzzled*): Oh?—

JUDITH: I love my garden, you know—it's so peaceful and quaint. I spend long days dreaming away in it—you know how one dreams.

SANDY: Oh, yes.

JUDITH (*warming up*): I always longed to leave the brittle glamour of cities and theatres and find rest in some old-world nook. That's why we came to Cookham.

SANDY: It's awfully nice—Cookham.

JUDITH: Have you ever seen me on the stage?

SANDY: Rather!

JUDITH: What in?

SANDY: That thing when you pretended to cheat at cards to save your husband's good name.

JUDITH: Oh, "The Bold Deceiver." That play was never quite right.

SANDY: You were absolutely wonderful. That was when I first fell in love with you.

JUDITH (*delighted*): Was it, really?

SANDY: Yes; you were so frightfully pathetic and brave.

JUDITH (*basking*): Was I?

SANDY: Rather!

There is a pause.

JUDITH: Well, go on. . . .

SANDY: I feel such a fool, telling you what I think, as though it mattered.

JUDITH: Of course it matters—to me, anyhow.

SANDY: Does it—honestly?

JUDITH: Certainly.

SANDY: It seems too good to be true—sitting here and talking as though we were old friends.

JUDITH: We *are* old friends—we probably met in another life. Reincarnation, you know—fascinating!

SANDY: You do say ripping things.

JUDITH: Do I? Give me a cigarette and let's put our feet up.

SANDY: All right.

They settle themselves comfortably at opposite ends of the sofa, smoking.

JUDITH: Can you punt?

SANDY: Yes—a bit.

JUDITH: You must teach Simon—he always gets the pole stuck.

SANDY: I'd rather teach you.

JUDITH: You're so gallant and chivalrous—much more like an American than an Englishman.

SANDY: I should like to go on saying nice things to you for ever.

JUDITH (*giving him her hand*): Sandy!

There comes a loud ring at the bell. JUDITH jumps.

There now!

SANDY: Is anyone else coming to stay?

JUDITH: Anyone else! You don't know—you just don't know. Give me my hat.

SANDY (*giving it to her*): You said it would be quite quiet, with nobody at all.

JUDITH: I was wrong. It's going to be very noisy, with herds of angry people stamping about.

CLARA enters and opens the front door. MYRA ARUNDEL is posed outside, consciously well-dressed, with several suit-cases, and a tennis racquet.

MYRA (*advancing*): Judith—my dear—this is divine!

JUDITH (*emptily*): Too, too lovely—Where are the others?

MYRA: What others?

CLARA goes out.

JUDITH: Did you come by the four-thirty?

MYRA: Yes.

JUDITH: Didn't you see anyone at the station?

MYRA: Yes; several people, but I didn't know they were coming here.

JUDITH: Well, they are.

MYRA: Sorel said it was going to be just ourselves this week-end.

JUDITH (*sharply*): Sorel?

MYRA: Yes—didn't she tell you she'd asked me? Weren't you expecting me?

JUDITH: Simon muttered something about your coming, but Sorel didn't mention it. Wasn't that odd of her?

MYRA: You're a divinely mad family. (*To SANDY*) How-do-you-do? It's useless to wait for introductions with the Blisses. My name's Myra Arundel.

JUDITH (*airily*): Sandy Tyrell, Myra Arundel; Myra Arundel, Sandy Tyrell. There.

MYRA: Is that your car outside?

SANDY: Yes.

MYRA: Well, Judith, I do think you might have told me someone was motoring down. A nice car would have been so much more comfortable than that beastly train.

JUDITH: I never knew you were coming until a little while ago.

MYRA: It's heavenly here—after London. The heat was terrible when I left. You look awfully well, Judith. Rusticating obviously agrees with you.

JUDITH: I'm glad you think so. Personally, I feel that a nervous breakdown is imminent.

MYRA: My dear, how ghastly! What's the matter?

JUDITH: Nothing's the matter yet, Myra, but I have presentiments. Come upstairs, Sandy, and I'll show you your room.

She begins to go upstairs, followed by SANDY. Then she turns.

I'll send Simon down to you. He's shaving, I think, but you won't mind that, will you?

She goes off. MYRA makes a slight grimace after her, then she helps herself to a cigarette and wanders about the hall—she might almost play the piano a little; anyhow, she is perfectly at home.

SIMON comes downstairs very fast, putting on his coat. He has apparently finished his toilet.

SIMON: Myra, this is marvellous! (*He tries to kiss her.*)

MYRA (*pushing him away*): No, Simon dear; it's too hot.

SIMON: You look beautifully cool.

MYRA: I'm more than cool really, but it's not climatic coolness. I've been mentally chilled to the marrow by Judith's attitude.

SIMON: Why, what did she say?

MYRA: Nothing very much. She was bouncing about on the sofa with a hearty young thing in flannels, and seemed to resent my appearance rather.

SIMON: You mustn't take any notice of Mother.

MYRA: I'll try not to, but it's difficult.

SIMON: She adores you, really.

MYRA: I'm sure she does.

SIMON: She's annoyed to-day because Father and Sorel have been asking people down without telling her.

MYRA: Poor dear! I quite see why.

SIMON: You look enchanting.

MYRA: Thank you, Simon.

SIMON: Are you pleased to see me?

MYRA: Of course. That's why I came.

SIMON: Darling!

MYRA: Sssh! Don't shout.

SIMON: I feel most colossally temperamental—I should like to kiss you and kiss you and kiss you and break everything in the house and then jump into the river.

MYRA: Dear Simon!

SIMON: You're everything I want you to be—absolutely everything. Marvellous clothes, marvellous looks, marvellous brain—Oh, God, it's terrible. . . .

MYRA: I dined with Charlie Templeton last night.

SIMON: Well, you're a devil. You only did it to annoy me. He's far too plump, and he can't do anything but dither about the Embassy in badly-cut trousers. You loathe him really; you know you do—you're too intelligent not to. You couldn't like him and me at the same time—it's impossible!

MYRA: Don't be so conceited.

SIMON: Darling—I adore you.

MYRA: That's right.

SIMON: But you're callous—that's what it is, callous!

You don't care a damn. You don't love me a bit, do you?

MYRA: Love's a very big word, Simon.

SIMON: It isn't—it's tiny. What are we to do?

MYRA: What do you mean?

SIMON: We can't go on like this.

MYRA: I'm not going on like anything.

SIMON: Yes, you are; you're going on like Medusa, and there are awful snakes popping their heads out at me from under your hat—I shall be turned to stone in a minute, and then you'll be sorry.

MYRA (*laughing*): You're very sweet, and I'm *very* fond of you.

SIMON: Tell me what you've been doing—everything.

MYRA: Nothing.

SIMON: What did you do after you'd dined with Charlie Templeton?

MYRA: Supped with Charlie Templeton.

SIMON: Well, I don't mind a bit. I hope you ate a lot and enjoyed yourself—there!

MYRA: Generous boy! Come and kiss me.

SIMON: You're only playing up to me now; you don't really want to a bit.

MYRA: I'm aching for it.

SIMON (*kissing her violently*): I love you.

MYRA: This week-end's going to be strenuous.

SIMON: Hell upon earth—fifteen million people in the house. We'll get up at seven and rush away down the river.

MYRA: No, we won't.

SIMON: Don't let either of us agree to anything we say—we'll both be difficult. I love being difficult.

MYRA: You certainly do.

SIMON: But I'm in the most lovely mood now. Just seeing you makes me feel grand——

MYRA: Is your father here?

SIMON: Yes; he's working on a new novel.

MYRA: He writes brilliantly.

SIMON: Doesn't he? He drinks too much tea, though.

MYRA: It can't do him much harm, surely?

SIMON: It tans the stomach.

MYRA: Who is Sandy Tyrell?

SIMON: Never heard of him.

MYRA: He's here, with Judith.

SIMON: Oh, that poor thing with hot hands! We'll ignore him.

MYRA: I thought he looked rather nice.

SIMON: You must be mad. He looked disgusting.

MYRA (*laughing*): Idiot!

SIMON (*flinging himself on the sofa*): Smooth my hair with your soft white hands.

MYRA (*ruffling it*): It's got glue on it.

SIMON (*catching her hand and kissing it*): You smell heavenly. What is it?

MYRA: Borgia of Rosine.

SIMON: How appropriate. (*He pulls her down and kisses her.*)

MYRA (*breaking away*): You're too demonstrative today, Simon.

The front door bell rings.

SIMON: Damn, damn! it's those drearies.

MYRA *powders her nose as CLARA crosses to open door.*

RICHARD GREATHAM and JACKIE CORYTON come in. There is, by this time, a good deal of luggage on the step. RICHARD is iron-grey and tall; JACKIE is small and shingled, with an ingenuous manner which will lose its charm as she grows older.

RICHARD: This is Mrs. Bliss's house.

CLARA (*off-hand*): Oh, yes, this is it.

RICHARD: Is Miss Sorel Bliss in?

CLARA: I expect so. I'll see if I can find her. (*She goes upstairs, humming a tune.*)

SIMON: Hallo. Did you have a nice journey?

RICHARD: Yes, thank you, very nice. I met Miss Coryton at the station. We introduced ourselves while we were waiting for the only taxi to come back.

MYRA: Oh, I took the only taxi. How maddening of me.

RICHARD: Mrs. Arundel! How-do-you-do. I never recognised you.

They shake hands.

JACKIE: I did.

MYRA: Why? Have we met anywhere?

JACKIE: No; I mean I recognised you as the one who took the taxi.

RICHARD (*to SIMON*): You are Sorel's brother?

SIMON: Yes; she'll be down in a minute. Come out into the garden, Myra——

MYRA: But, Simon, we can't. . . .

SIMON (*grabbing her hand and dragging her off*): Yes, we can. I shall go mad if I stay in the house a moment longer. (*Over his shoulder to RICHARD and JACKIE*) Tea will be here soon.

He and MYRA go off.

JACKIE: Well!

RICHARD: A strange young man.

JACKIE: Very rude, I think.

RICHARD: Have you ever met him before?

JACKIE: No; I don't know any of them except Mr. Bliss—he's a wonderful person.

RICHARD: I wonder if he knows you're here.

JACKIE: Perhaps that funny woman who opened the door will tell him.

RICHARD: It was fortunate that we met at the station.

JACKIE: I'm frightfully glad. I should have been terrified arriving all by myself.

RICHARD: I do hope the weather will keep good over Sunday—the country round here is delightful.

JACKIE: Yes.

RICHARD: There's nowhere like England in the spring and summer.

JACKIE: No, there isn't, is there?

RICHARD: There's a sort of *quality* you find in no other countries.

JACKIE: Have you travelled a lot?

RICHARD (*modestly*): A good deal.

JACKIE: How lovely.

There is a pause.

RICHARD: Spain is very beautiful.

JACKIE: Yes, I've always heard Spain was awfully nice.

RICHARD: Except for the bull-fights. No one whoever really loved horses could enjoy a bull-fight.

JACKIE: Nor anyone who loved bulls either.

RICHARD: Exactly.

JACKIE: Italy's awfully nice, isn't it?

RICHARD: Oh, yes, charming.

JACKIE: I've always wanted to go to Italy.

RICHARD: Rome is a beautiful city.

JACKIE: Yes, I've always heard Rome was lovely.

RICHARD: And Naples and Capri—Capri's enchanting.

JACKIE: It must be.

RICHARD: Have you ever been abroad at all?

JACKIE: Oh, yes; I went to Dieppe once—we had a house there for the summer.

RICHARD (*kindly*): Dear little place—Dieppe.

JACKIE: Yes, it was lovely.

JUDITH comes downstairs, followed by SANDY, with his arms full of cushions. She motions him out into the garden, sits down and puts on her goloshes, and then follows him.

JACKIE: Well!

RICHARD: Russia used to be a wonderful country before the war.

JACKIE: It must have been. . . . Was that her?

RICHARD: Who?

JACKIE: Judith Bliss.

RICHARD: Yes, I expect it was.

JACKIE: I wish I'd never come.

RICHARD: You mustn't worry. They're a very Bohemian family, I believe.

JACKIE: I wonder if Mr. Bliss knows I'm here.

RICHARD: I wonder.

JACKIE: Couldn't we ring a bell, or anything?

RICHARD: Yes, perhaps we'd better. (*He finds bell and presses it.*)

JACKIE: I don't suppose it rings.

RICHARD: You mustn't be depressed.

JACKIE: I feel horrid.

RICHARD: It's always a little embarrassing coming to a strange house for the first time. You'll like Sorel—she's charming.

JACKIE (*desperately*): I wonder where she is.

RICHARD (*consolingly*): I expect tea will be here soon.

JACKIE: Do you think they *have* tea?

RICHARD (*alarmed*): Oh, yes—they must.

JACKIE: Oh, well, we'd better go on waiting, then. (*She sits down.*)

RICHARD: Do you mind if I smoke?

JACKIE: Not a bit.

RICHARD: Will you?

JACKIE: No, thank you.

RICHARD (*sitting down*): I got this case in Japan. It's pretty, isn't it?

JACKIE: Awfully pretty.

They lapse into hopeless silence.

Enter SOREL, down stairs.

SOREL: Oh, Richard, I'm dreadfully sorry. I didn't know you were here.

RICHARD: We've been here a good while.

SOREL: How awful! Please forgive me. I was upstairs.

RICHARD: This is Miss Coryton.

SOREL: Oh!

JACKIE: How-do-you-do.

SOREL: Have you come to see Father?

JACKIE: Yes.

SOREL: He's in his study—you'd better go up.

JACKIE: I don't know the way.

SOREL (*irritably*): Oh, well—I'll take you. Come on. Wait a minute, Richard. (*She takes her to the top of the stairs.*) It's along that passage, and the third door on the right.

JACKIE: Oh, thank you. (*She goes out despondently*).

SOREL (*coming down again*): The poor girl looks half-witted.

RICHARD: She's shy, I think.

SOREL: I hope Father will find her a comfort.

RICHARD: Tell me one thing, Sorel, did your Father and Mother know I was coming?

SOREL: Oh, yes; they were awfully pleased.

RICHARD: A rather nice-looking woman came down, in a big hat, and went into the garden with a young man, without saying a word.

SOREL: That was Mother, I expect. We're an independent family—we entertain our friends sort of separately.

RICHARD: Oh, I see.

SOREL: It was sweet of you to come.

RICHARD: I wanted to come—I've thought about you a lot.

SOREL: Have you really? That's thrilling.

RICHARD: I mean it. You're so alive and vital and different from other people.

SOREL: I'm so frightened that you'll be bored here.

RICHARD: Why should I be?

SOREL: Oh, I don't know. But you won't be, will you? —or if you are, tell me at once, and we'll do something quite different.

RICHARD: You're rather a dear, you know.

SOREL: I'm not—I'm devastating, entirely lacking in

restraint. So's Simon. It's Father's and Mother's fault really; you see, they're so vague—they've spent their lives cultivating their Arts and not devoting any time to ordinary conventions and manners and things. I'm the only one who sees that, so I'm trying to be better. I'd love to be beautifully poised and carry off difficult situations with a lift of the eyebrows—

RICHARD: I'm sure you could carry off anything.

SOREL: There you are, you see, saying the right thing! You always say the right thing, and no one knows a bit what you're really thinking. That's what I adore.

RICHARD: I'm afraid to say anything now, in case you think I'm only being correct.

SOREL: But you are correct. I wish you'd teach Simon to be correct too.

RICHARD: It would be uphill work, I'm afraid.

SOREL: Why, don't you like him?

RICHARD: I've only met him for a moment.

SOREL: Would you like to see the garden?

RICHARD: Very much indeed.

SOREL: As a matter of fact, we'd better wait until after tea. Shall I sing you something?

RICHARD: Please—I should love it.

SOREL: I don't want to really a bit—only I'm trying to entertain you. It's as easy as pie to talk in someone else's house, like at the dance the other night, but here on my own ground I'm finding it difficult.

RICHARD (*puzzled*): I'm sorry.

SOREL: Oh, it isn't your fault; honestly, it isn't—you're awfully kind and responsive. What shall we do?

RICHARD: I'm quite happy talking—to you.

SOREL: Can you play Mah Jong?

RICHARD: No, I'm afraid I can't.

SOREL: I'm so glad—I do hate it so.

CLARA enters, with preparations for tea. SOREL sighs with relief.

Here's tea.

CLARA: Where's your Mother, dear?

SOREL: Out in the garden, I think.

CLARA: It's starting to rain.

SOREL: Oh, everyone will come dashing in, then. How awful!

RICHARD: Won't the luggage get rather wet, out there?

SOREL: What luggage?

CLARA: I'll bring it in when I've made the tea.

RICHARD (rising): Oh, don't trouble; I'll do it now.

SOREL: We ought to have got William up from the village.

CLARA: It's Saturday.

SOREL: I know it is.

CLARA: He's playing cricket.

RICHARD opens the front door and proceeds to bring the luggage in. SOREL rushes to help him.

SOREL: Do sit down and smoke. I can easily manage it.

RICHARD: Certainly not.

SOREL: How typical of Myra to have so many bags.

. . . Ooh!

She staggers with a suit-case. RICHARD goes to her assistance, and they both drop it.

There now!—we've probably broken something.

RICHARD: This is the last one. . . . (He brings in a dressing-case, and wipes his hand on his handkerchief.)

SOREL: Do you know where to wash if you want to?

RICHARD: No—but I'm all right.

Re-enter CLARA, with tea and hot-water jug.

SIMON and MYRA come in from the garden.

MYRA: Hullo, Sorel, how are you?

SOREL: I'm splendid. Do you know Mr. Greatham?

MYRA: Oh, yes; we've met several times.

SIMON: Come and sit down, Myra.

DAVID and JACKIE come downstairs.

DAVID: Is tea ready?

SOREL: Yes; just.

DAVID: Simon, come and be nice to Miss Coryton.

SIMON: We've met already.

DAVID: That's no reason for you not to be nice to her.

MYRA (*firmlly*): How-do-you-do.

DAVID: How-do-you-do. Are you staying here?

MYRA: I hope so.

DAVID: You must forgive me for being rather frowsy, but I've been working hard.

SOREL: Father, this is Mr. Greatham.

DAVID: How are you? When did you arrive?

RICHARD: This afternoon.

DAVID: Good. Have some tea. (*He begins to pour it out.*) Everyone had better put their own sugar and milk in, or we shall get muddled. Where's your mother, Simon?

SIMON: She was last seen in the punt.

DAVID: How extraordinary! She can't punt.

SOREL: Sandy Tyrell's with her.

DAVID: Oh, well, she'll be all right then. Who is he?

SOREL: I don't know.

DAVID: Do sit down, everybody.

Enter JUDITH and SANDY from the garden.

JUDITH: There's going to be a thunderstorm. I felt sick this morning. This is Sandy Tyrell—Everybody—

RICHARD (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do.

SOREL: Mother, I want you to meet Mr. Greatham.

JUDITH: Oh, yes. You were here before, weren't you?

SIMON: Before *what*, darling?

JUDITH: Before I went out in the punt. There was somebody else here too—a fair girl—(*She sees JACKIE.*) Oh, there you are. How-do-you-do. Sit down, Sandy, and eat anything you want. Give Sandy some bread-and-butter, Simon.

Everybody sits down.

SIMON (*ungraciously*): Here you are.

SANDY: Thanks.

There is a long pause; then MYRA and RICHARD speak together.

RICHARD: { How far are you from Maidenhead exactly?

MYRA: } What a pity it's raining—we might have had some tennis—

They both stop, to let the other go on. There is another terrible silence.

MYRA: { I adore the shape of this hall—it's so—

RICHARD: } The train was awfully crowded coming down—

They both stop again, and there is another dead silence, during which

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

ACT II

It is after dinner on the Saturday evening.

Everyone is talking and arguing.

The following scene should be played with great speed.

SIMON: Who'll go out?

SOREL: I don't mind.

SIMON: No; you always guess it too quickly.

JACKIE: What do we have to do?

JUDITH: Choose an adverb, and then——

SIMON: Someone goes out, you see, and comes in, and you've chosen a word among yourselves, and she or he or whoever it is asks you some sort of question and you have to——

SOREL: Not an ordinary question, Simon; they have to ask them to do something in the manner of the word, and then——

SIMON: Then, you see, you act whatever it is——

SOREL: The answer to the question, you see?

RICHARD (*apprehensively*): What sort of thing is one expected to do?

JUDITH: Quite usual things, like reciting "If," or playing the piano——

RICHARD: I can't play the piano.

SIMON: Never mind; you can fake it, as long as it conveys an idea of the word.

JACKIE: The word we've all thought of?

SOREL (*impatient*): Yes, the word we've chosen when whoever it is is out of the room.

JACKIE: I'm afraid I don't quite understand yet.

SIMON: Never mind; I'll explain. You see, someone goes out. . . .

SOREL: I'll go out the first time, just to show her.

JUDITH: It's quite simple—all you have to do is just act in the manner of the word.

SOREL: Look here, everybody, I'm going out.

SIMON: All right; go on.

MYRA: The History game's awfully good—when two people go out, and come back as Queen Elizabeth and Crippen or somebody.

SANDY (*despondently*): I'm no earthly good at this sort of thing.

SOREL: I'll show you, Sandy. You see . . .

JUDITH: There's always "How, When and Where?" We haven't played that for ages.

SIMON: We will afterwards. We'll do this one first.—Go on, Sorel.

SOREL: Don't be too long. (*She goes out.*)

SIMON: Now then.

JUDITH: "Bitterly."

SIMON: No, we did that last week; she'll know.

DAVID: "Intensely."

JUDITH: Too difficult.

RICHARD: There was an amusing game I played once at the Harringtons' house. Everyone was blindfolded except—

SIMON: This room's not big enough for that. What about "winsomely"?

JACKIE: I wish I knew what we had to do.

JUDITH: You'll see when we start playing.

MYRA: *If* we start playing.

SIMON: Mother's brilliant at this. Do you remember when we played it at the Mackenzies'?

JUDITH: Yes, and Blanche was so cross when I kissed Freddie's ear in the manner of the word.

RICHARD: What was the word?

JUDITH: I can't remember.

MYRA: Perhaps it's as well.

DAVID: What about "drearly"?

JUDITH: Not definite enough.

SIMON: "Winsomely" is the best.

JUDITH: She's sure to guess it straight off.

SIMON (*confidentially to JACKIE*): These games are much too brainy for me.

DAVID: Young Norman Robertson used to be marvellous—do you remember?

SIMON: Yes, wonderful sense of humour.

MYRA: He's lost it all since his marriage.

JUDITH: I didn't know you knew him.

MYRA: Well, considering he married my cousin—

RICHARD: We don't seem to be getting on with the game.

JUDITH: We haven't thought of a word yet.

MYRA: "Brightly."

SIMON: Too obvious.

MYRA: Very well—don't snap at me!

JUDITH: "Saucily." I've got a lovely idea for "saucily."

MYRA (*at SIMON*): I should think "rudely" would be the easiest.

SIMON: Don't be sour, Myra.

JUDITH: The great thing is to get an obscure word.

SIMON: What a pity Irene isn't here—she knows masses of obscure words.

MYRA: She's probably picked them up from her obscure friends.

SIMON: It's no use being catty about Irene; she's a perfect darling.

MYRA: I wasn't being catty at all.

SIMON: Yes, you were.

SOREL (*off*): Hurry up!

JUDITH: Quickly, now! We must think——

JACKIE (*helpfully*): "Appendicitis."

JUDITH (*witheringly*): That's not an adverb.

SIMON: You're thinking of Charades.

SANDY: Charades are damned good fun.

SIMON: Yes, but we don't happen to be doing them at the moment.

SANDY: Sorry.

JUDITH: "Saucily."

SIMON: No, "winsomely's" better.

JUDITH: All right. Call her in.

SIMON (*calling*): Sorel—come on; we're ready.

Re-enter SOREL.

SANDY (*hoarsely to SIMON*): which is it?—"saucily" or "winsomely"?

SIMON (*whispering*): "Winsomely."

SOREL (*to JUDITH*): Go and take a flower out of that vase and give it to Richard.

JUDITH: Very well.

She trips lightly over to the vase, gurgling with coy

laughter, selects a flower, then goes over to RICHARD; pursing her lips into a mock smile, she gives him the flower, with a little girlish gasp at her own daring, and wags her finger archly at him.

SIMON: Marvellous, Mother!

SOREL (*laughing*): Oh, lovely! . . . Now, Myra, get up and say good-bye to everyone in the manner of the word.

MYRA (*rises and starts with DAVID*): Good-bye. It really has been most delightful—

JUDITH: No, no, no!

MYRA: Why—what do you mean?

JUDITH: You haven't got the right intonation a bit.

SIMON: Oh, Mother darling, do shut up!

MYRA (*acidly*): Remember what an advantage you have over we poor amateurs, Judith, having been a professional for so long.

JUDITH: I don't like "so long" very much.

SOREL: Do you think we might go on now?

MYRA: Go to the next one; I'm not going to do any more.

SIMON: Oh, please do. You were simply splendid.

SOREL: It doesn't matter. (*To RICHARD*) Light a cigarette in the manner of the word.

RICHARD: I've forgotten what it is.

JUDITH (*grimacing at him violently*): You remember . . .

RICHARD: Oh, yes.

He proceeds to light a cigarette with great abandon, winking his eye and chuckling SOREL under the chin.

JUDITH: Oh, no, no, no!

MYRA: I can't think what that's meant to be.

RICHARD (*offended*): I was doing my best.

JUDITH: It's so *frightfully* easy, and nobody can do it right.

SIMON: I believe you've muddled it up.

RICHARD: You'd better go on to the next one.

JUDITH: Which word were you doing? Whisper—

RICHARD (*whispering*): "Saucily."

JUDITH: I knew it!—He was doing the wrong word.
(*She whispers to him.*)

RICHARD: Oh, I see. I'm so sorry.

JUDITH: Give him another chance.

SIMON: No, it's Jackie's turn now; it will come round to him again. I'm afraid.

SOREL (*to JACKIE*): Do a dance in the manner of the word.

JACKIE (*giggling*): I can't.

JUDITH: Nonsense! Of course you can.

JACKIE: I can't—honestly—I . . .

SIMON (*pulling her to her feet*): Go on; have a shot at it.

JACKIE: No, I'd much rather not. Count me out.

JUDITH: Really, the ridiculous fuss everyone makes—

JACKIE: I'm awfully stupid at anything like this.

SOREL: It's only a game, after all.

DAVID: Come along—try.

JACKIE (*dragging back*): I couldn't—please don't ask me to. I simply couldn't.

SIMON: Leave her alone if she doesn't want to.

SOREL (*irritably*): What's the use of playing at all, if people won't do it properly?

JUDITH: It's *so* simple.

SANDY: It's awfully difficult if you haven't done it before.

SIMON: Go on to the next one.

SOREL (*firmly*): Unless everyone's in it we won't play at all.

SIMON: Now don't lose your temper.

SOREL: Lose my temper! I like that! No one's given me the slightest indication of what the word is—you all argue and squabble—

DAVID: Talk, talk, talk! Everybody talks too much.

JUDITH: It's so surprising to me when people won't play up. After all—

JACKIE (*with spirit*): It's a hateful game, anyhow, and I don't want to play it again ever.

SOREL: You haven't played it at all yet.

SIMON: Don't be rude, Sorel.

SOREL: Really, Simon, the way you go on is infuriating!

SIMON: It's always the way; whenever Sorel goes out she gets quarrelsome.

SOREL: Quarrelsome!

SIMON: Don't worry, Jackie; you needn't do anything you don't want to.

JUDITH: I think, for the future, we'd better confine our efforts to social conversation and not attempt anything in the least intelligent.

SIMON: How can you be so unkind, Mother?

JUDITH (*sharply*): Don't speak to me like that.

JACKIE: It's all my fault—I know I'm awfully silly, but it embarrasses me so terribly doing anything in front of people.

SOREL (*with acidity*): I should think the word was "winsomely."

SIMON: You must have been listening outside the door then.

SOREL: Not at all—Miss Coryton gave it away.

SIMON: Why “Miss Coryton” all of a sudden? You’ve been calling her Jackie all the evening. You’re far too grand, Sorel.

SOREL: And you’re absolutely maddening—I’ll never play another game with you as long as I live.

SIMON: That won’t break my heart.

JUDITH: Stop, stop, stop!

SIMON (*grabbing JACKIE’s hand*): Come out in the garden. I’m sick of this.

SOREL: Don’t let him take you on the river; he isn’t very good at it.

SIMON (*over his shoulder*): Ha, ha!—very funny. (*He drags JACKIE off.*)

JUDITH: Sorel, you’re behaving disgracefully.

SOREL: Simon ought to go into the Army, or something.

DAVID: You both ought to be in Reformatories.

SOREL: This always happens whenever we play a game. We’re a beastly family, and I hate us.

JUDITH: Speak for yourself, dear.

SOREL: I can’t, without speaking for everyone else too—we’re all exactly the same, and I’m ashamed of us.—Come into the library, Sandy. (*She drags SANDY off.*)

MYRA: Charming! It’s all perfectly charming.

DAVID: I think it would be better, Judith, if you exercised a little more influence over the children.

JUDITH: That’s right—blame it all on me.

DAVID: After all, dear, you started it, by snapping everybody up.

JUDITH: You ought never to have married me, David; it was a great mistake.

DAVID: The atmosphere of this house is becoming more unbearable every day, and all because Simon and Sorel are allowed to do exactly what they like.

JUDITH: You sit upstairs all day, writing your novels.

DAVID: Novels which earn us our daily bread.

JUDITH: "Daily bread" nonsense! We've got enough money to keep us in comfort until we die.

DAVID: That will be very soon, if we can't get a little peace. (*To MYRA*) Come out into the garden—

JUDITH: I sincerely hope the night air will cool you.

DAVID: I don't know what's happened to you lately, Judith.

JUDITH: Nothing's happened to me—nothing ever does. You're far too smug to allow it.

DAVID: Smug! Thank you.

JUDITH: Yes, smug, smug, smug! And pompous!

DAVID: I hope you haven't been drinking, dear.

JUDITH: Drinking! Huh! that's very amusing!

DAVID: I think it's rather tragic, at your time of life.
(*He goes out with MYRA.*)

JUDITH: David's been a good husband to me, but he's wearing a bit thin now.

RICHARD: Would you like me to go? To leave you alone for a little?

JUDITH: Why? Are you afraid I shall become violent?

RICHARD (*smiling*): No; I merely thought perhaps I was in the way.

JUDITH: I hope you're not embarrassed—I couldn't bear you to be embarrassed.

RICHARD: Not in the least.

JUDITH: Marriage is a hideous affair altogether, don't you think?

RICHARD: I'm really hardly qualified to judge, you see.

JUDITH: Do stop being non-committal, just for once; it's doubly annoying in the face of us all having lost control so lamentably.

RICHARD: I'm sorry.

JUDITH: There's nothing to be sorry for, really, because, after all, it's your particular "thing," isn't it?—observing everything and not giving yourself away an inch.

RICHARD: I suppose it is.

JUDITH: You'll get used to us in time, you know, and then you'll feel cosier. Why don't you sit down? (*She sits on sofa.*)

RICHARD: I'm enjoying myself very much.

JUDITH: It's very sweet of you to say so, but I don't see how you can be.

RICHARD (*laughing suddenly*): But I am!

JUDITH: There now! that was quite a genuine laugh. We're getting on. Are you in love with Sorel?

RICHARD (*surprised and embarrassed*): In love with Sorel?

JUDITH (*repentantly*): Now I've killed it—I've murdered the little tender feeling of comfort that was stealing over you, by sheer tactlessness! Will you teach me to be tactful?

RICHARD: Did you really think I was in love with Sorel?

JUDITH: It's so difficult to tell, isn't it?—I mean, you might not know yourself. She's very attractive.

RICHARD: Yes, she is—very.

JUDITH: Have you heard her sing?

RICHARD: No, not yet.

JUDITH: She sings beautifully. Are you susceptible to music?

RICHARD: I'm afraid I don't know very much about it.

JUDITH: You probably are, then. I'll sing you something.

RICHARD: Please do.

JUDITH (*rising*): It's awfully sad for a woman of my temperament to have a grown-up daughter, you know. I have to put my pride in my pocket and develop in her all the charming little feminine tricks which will eventually cut me out altogether.

RICHARD: That wouldn't be possible.

JUDITH: I do hope you meant that, because it was a sweet remark. (*She is at the piano, turning over music.*)

RICHARD (*following her*): Of course I meant it.

JUDITH: Will you lean on the piano in an attentive attitude? It's such a help.

RICHARD: You're an extraordinary person.

JUDITH (*beginning to play*): In what way extraordinary?

RICHARD: When I first met Sorel, I guessed what you'd be like.

JUDITH: Did you, now? And am I?

RICHARD (*smiling*): Exactly.

JUDITH: Oh, well. . . . (*She plays and sings a little French song.*)

There is a slight pause when it is finished.

RICHARD (*with feeling*): Thank you.

JUDITH (*rising from the piano*): It's pretty, isn't it?

RICHARD: Perfectly enchanting.

JUDITH: Shall we sit down again? (*She re-seats herself on sofa.*)

RICHARD: Won't you sing any more?

JUDITH: No, no more—I want you to talk to me and tell me all about yourself, and the things you've done.

RICHARD: I've done nothing.

JUDITH: What a shame! Why not?

RICHARD: I never realise how dead I am until I meet people like you. It's depressing, you know.

JUDITH: What nonsense! You're not a bit dead.

RICHARD: Do you always live here?

JUDITH: I'm going to, from now onwards. I intend to sink into a very beautiful old age. When the children marry, I shall wear a cap.

RICHARD (*smiling*): How absurd!

JUDITH: I don't mean a funny cap.

RICHARD: You're far too full of vitality to sink into anything.

JUDITH: It's entirely spurious vitality. If you troubled to look below the surface, you'd find a very wistful and weary spirit. I've been battling with life for a long time.

RICHARD: Surely such successful battles as yours have been are not wearying?

JUDITH: Yes, they are—frightfully. I've reached an age now when I just want to sit back and let things go on around me—and they do.

RICHARD: I should like to know exactly what you're thinking about—really.

JUDITH: I was thinking of calling you Richard. It's such a nice uncompromising name.

RICHARD: I should be very flattered if you would.

JUDITH: I won't suggest you calling me Judith until you feel really comfortable about me.

RICHARD: But I do—Judith.

JUDITH: I'm awfully glad. Will you give me a cigarette?

RICHARD (*producing case*): Certainly.

JUDITH (*taking one*): That's a divine case.

RICHARD: It was given to me in Japan three years ago. All those little designs mean things.

JUDITH (*bending over it*): What sort of things?

RICHARD: Charms for happiness, and luck, and—love.

JUDITH: Which is the charm for love?

RICHARD: That one.

JUDITH: What a dear!

RICHARD (*kissing her gently*): Judith!

JUDITH (*jumping*): Richard!

RICHARD: I'm afraid I couldn't help it.

JUDITH (*dramatically*): What are we to do? What are we to do?

RICHARD: I don't know.

JUDITH: David must be told—everything!

RICHARD (*alarmed*): Everything?

JUDITH (*enjoying herself*): Yes, yes. There come moments in life when it is necessary to be honest—absolutely honest. I've trained myself always to shun the underhand methods other women so often employ—the truth must be faced fair and square—

RICHARD (*extremely alarmed*): The truth? I don't quite understand.

JUDITH: Dear Richard, you want to spare me, I know—you're so chivalrous; but it's no use. After all, as I said before, David has been a good husband to me, according

to his lights. This may, of course, break him up rather, but it can't be helped; he must be told. I wonder—oh, I wonder how he'll take it. They say suffering's good for writers, it strengthens their psychology. Oh, my poor, poor David!—Never mind. You'd better go out into the garden and wait—

RICHARD (*flustered*): Wait? What for?

JUDITH: For me, Richard, for me. I will come to you later. Wait in the summer-house. I had begun to think that Romance was dead, that I should never know it again. Before, of course, I had my work and my life in the theatre, but now, nothing—nothing! Everything is empty and hollow, like a broken shell.

RICHARD: Look here, Judith, I apologise for what I did just now. I—

JUDITH (*ignoring all interruption*): But now you have come, and it's all changed—it's magic. I'm under a spell that I never thought to recapture again. Go along—
(She pushes him towards the garden.)

RICHARD (*protesting*): But, Judith—

JUDITH (*pushing him firmly*): Don't—don't make it any harder for me. I am quite resolved—it is my self-appointed Calvary, and it's the only possible way!

She pushes him into the garden and waves to him bravely with her handkerchief; then she comes back into the room and powders her nose before the glass and puts her hair into place. Then, assuming an expression of restrained tragedy, she opens the library door, from which she recoils genuinely shocked.

After a moment or two SOREL and SANDY come out rather sheepishly.

SOREL: Look here, Mother, I——

JUDITH: Sorel, what am I to say to you?

SOREL: I don't know, Mother.

JUDITH: Neither do I.

SANDY: It was my fault, Mrs. Bliss——Judith——

JUDITH: What a fool I've been! What a blind fool!

SOREL: Mother, are you *really* upset?

JUDITH (*with feeling*): I'm stunned.

SOREL: But, darling——

JUDITH (*gently*): Don't speak for a moment, Sorel; we must all be very quiet, and think——

SOREL: It was nothing, really. For Heaven's sake——

JUDITH: Nothing! I open the library door casually, and what do I see? I ask you, what do I see?

SANDY: I'm most awfully sorry. . . .

JUDITH: Ssshh! It has gone beyond superficial apologies.

SOREL: Mother, be natural for a minute.

JUDITH: I don't know what you mean, Sorel. I'm trying to realise a very bitter truth as calmly as I can.

SOREL: There's nothing so very bitter about it.

JUDITH: My poor child!

SOREL (*suddenly*): Very well, then! I love Sandy, and he loves me!

JUDITH: That would be the only possible excuse for your behaviour.

SOREL: Why shouldn't we love each other if we want to?

JUDITH: Sandy was in love with me this afternoon.

SOREL: Not real love—you know it wasn't.

JUDITH (*bitterly*): I know now.

SANDY: I say—look here—I'm most awfully sorry.

JUDITH: There's nothing to be sorry for, really; it's my fault for having been so—so ridiculous.

SOREL: Mother!

JUDITH (*sadly*): Yes, ridiculous. I'm getting old, old, and the sooner I face it the better.

SOREL (*hopelessly*): But, darling . . .

JUDITH (*splendidly*): Youth will be served. You're so pretty, Sorel, far prettier than I ever was—I'm very glad you're pretty.

SANDY: I feel a fearful cad.

JUDITH: Why should you? You've answered the only call that really counts—the call of Love, and Romance, and Spring. I forgive you, Sandy, completely. There.

SOREL: Well, that's all right, then.

JUDITH: I resent your tone, Sorel; you seem to be taking things too much for granted. Perhaps you don't realise that I am making a great sacrifice!

SOREL: Sorry, darling.

JUDITH: It's far from easy, at my time of life, to——

SOREL (*playing up*): Mother—Mother, say you understand and forgive!

JUDITH: Understand! You forget, dear, I am a woman.

SOREL: I know you are, Mother. That's what makes it all so poignant.

JUDITH (*magnanimously, to SANDY*): If you want Sorel, truly, I give her to you—unconditionally.

SANDY (*dazed*): Thanks—awfully, Mrs. Bliss.

JUDITH: You can still call me Judith, can't you?—it's not much to ask.

SANDY: Judith.

JUDITH (*bravely*): There, now. Away with melancholy.

This is all tremendously exciting, and we must all be very happy.

SOREL: Don't tell Father—yet.

JUDITH: We won't tell anybody; it shall be our little secret.

SOREL: You are splendid, Mother.

JUDITH: Nonsense. I just believe in being honest with myself—it's awfully good for one, you know, so cleansing. I'm going upstairs now to have a little aspirin—*(She goes upstairs, and turns.)* Ah, Youth, Youth, what a strange, mad muddle you make of things! *(She goes off.)*

SOREL heaves a slight sigh, and takes a cigarette.

SOREL: Well, that's that.

SANDY: Yes.

SOREL: It's all right. Don't look so gloomy—I know you don't love me really.

SANDY (*startled*): I say, Sorel—

SOREL: Don't protest; you know you don't—any more than I love you.

SANDY: But you told Judith—

SOREL (*nonchalantly*): I was only playing up—one always plays up to Mother in this house; it's a sort of unwritten law.

SANDY: Didn't she mean all she said?

SOREL: No, not really; we none of us ever mean anything.

SANDY: She seemed awfully upset.

SOREL: It must have been a slight shock for her to discover us clasped tightly in each other's arms.

SANDY: I believe I do love you, Sorel.

SOREL: A month ago I should have let you go on believ-

ing that, but now I can't—I'm bent on improving myself.

SANDY: I don't understand.

SOREL: Never mind—it doesn't matter. You just fell a victim to the atmosphere, that's all. There we were alone in the library, with the windows wide open, and probably a nightingale somewhere about—

SANDY: I only heard a cuckoo.

SOREL: Even a cuckoo has charm, in moderation. You kissed me because you were awfully nice and I was awfully nice and we both liked kissing very much. It was inevitable. Then Mother found us and got dramatic—her sense of the theatre is always fatal. She knows we shan't marry, the same as you and I do. You're under absolutely no obligation to me at all.

SANDY: I wish I understood you a bit better.

SOREL: Never mind about understanding me. Let's go back into the library.

SANDY: All right.

They go off.

After a moment's pause, DAVID and MYRA enter from the garden.

DAVID: . . . And, you see, he comes in and finds her there waiting for him.

MYRA: She hadn't been away at all?

DAVID: No; and that's psychologically right. I'm sure. No woman, under those circumstances, *would*.

MYRA: It's brilliant of you to see that. I do think the whole thing sounds most excellent.

DAVID: I got badly stuck in the middle of the book, when the boy comes down from Oxford—but it worked out all right eventually.

MYRA (*sitting on sofa*): When shall I be able to read it?

DAVID: I'll send you the proofs—you can help me correct them.

MYRA: How divine! I shall feel most important.

DAVID: Would you like a cigarette, or anything?

MYRA: No, thank you.

DAVID: I think I'll have a drink.

MYRA: Very well; give me some plain soda-water, then.

DAVID (*going to side table*): There isn't any ice—d'you mind?

MYRA: Not a bit.

DAVID (*bringing her drink*): Here you are.

MYRA: Thank you. (*She sips it.*) I wonder where everybody is.

DAVID: Not here, thank God.

MYRA: It must be dreadfully worrying for you, having a houseful of people.

DAVID (*having poured himself out a whisky-and-soda, sits down by her side*): It depends on the people.

MYRA: I have a slight confession to make.

DAVID: Confession?

MYRA: Yes. Do you know why I came down here?

DAVID: Not in the least. I suppose one of us asked you, didn't they?

MYRA: Oh, yes, they asked me, but—

DAVID: Well?

MYRA: I was invited once before—last September.

DAVID: I was in America then.

MYRA: Exactly.

DAVID: How do you mean "exactly"?

MYRA: I didn't come. I'm a very determined woman,

you know, and I made up my mind to meet you ages ago.

DAVID: That was charming of you. I'm not much to meet really.

MYRA: You see, I'd read "Broken Reeds."

DAVID: Did you like it?

MYRA: Like it! I think it's one of the finest novels I've ever read.

DAVID: There now!

MYRA: How do you manage to know so much about women?

DAVID: I'm afraid my knowledge of them is sadly superficial.

MYRA: Oh, no; you can't call Evelyn's character superficial—it's amazing.

DAVID: Why are you being so nice to me? Have you got a plan about something?

MYRA (*laughing*): How suspicious you are!

DAVID: I can't help it—you're very attractive, and I'm always suspicious of attractive people, on principle.

MYRA: Not a very good principle.

DAVID: I'll tell you something—strictly between ourselves.

MYRA: Do.

DAVID: You're wrong about me.

MYRA: Wrong? In what way?

DAVID: I write very bad novels.

MYRA: Don't be so ridiculous.

DAVID: And you *know* I do, because you're an intelligent person.

MYRA: I don't know anything of the sort.

DAVID: Tell me why you're being so nice to me?

MYRA: Because I want to be.

DAVID: Why?

MYRA: You've a very clever and amusing man.

DAVID: Splendid.

MYRA: And I think I've rather lost my heart to you.

DAVID: Shall we elope?

MYRA: David!

DAVID: There now, you've called me David!

MYRA: Do you mind?

DAVID: Not at all.

MYRA: I'm not sure that you're being very kind.

DAVID: What makes you think that?

MYRA: You're being rather the cynical author laughing up his sleeve at a gushing admirer.

DAVID: I think you're a very interesting woman, and extremely nice-looking.

MYRA: Do you?

DAVID: Yes. Would you like me to make love to you?

MYRA (*rising*): Really—I wish you wouldn't say things like that.

DAVID: I've knocked you off your plate—I'll look away for a minute while you climb on to it again. (*He does so.*)

MYRA (*laughing affectedly*): This is wonderful! (*She sits down again.*)

DAVID (*turning*): That's right. Now then—

MYRA: Now then, what?

DAVID: You're adorable—you're magnificent—you're tawny—

MYRA: I'm not tawny.

DAVID: Don't argue.

MYRA: This is sheer affectation.

DAVID: Affectation's very nice.

MYRA: No, it isn't—it's odious.

DAVID: You mustn't get cross.

MYRA: I'm not in the least cross.

DAVID: Yes, you are—but you're very alluring.

MYRA (*perking up*): Alluring?

DAVID: Terribly.

MYRA: I can hear your brain clicking—it's very funny.

DAVID: That was rather rude.

MYRA: You've been consistently rude to me for hours.

DAVID: Never mind.

MYRA: Why have you?

DAVID: I'm always rude to people I like.

MYRA: Do you like me?

DAVID: Enormously.

MYRA: How sweet of you!

DAVID: But I don't like your methods.

MYRA: Methods? What methods?

DAVID: You're far too pleasant to occupy yourself with the commonplace.

MYRA: And you spoil yourself by trying to be clever.

DAVID: Thank you.

MYRA: Anyhow, I don't know what you by mean commonplace.

DAVID: You mean you want me to explain?

MYRA: Not at all.

DAVID: Very well; I will.

MYRA: I shan't listen. (*She stops up her ears.*)

DAVID: You'll pretend not to, but you'll hear every word really.

MYRA (*sarcastically*): You're so inscrutable and quizzical—just what a feminine psychologist should be.

DAVID: Yes, aren't I?

MYRA: You frighten me dreadfully.

DAVID: Darling!

MYRA: Don't call me darling.

DAVID: That's unreasonable. You've been trying to make me—all the evening.

MYRA: Your conceit is outrageous!

DAVID: It's not conceit at all. You've been firmly buttering me up because you want a nice little intrigue.

MYRA (*rising*): How dare you!

DAVID (*pulling her down again*): It's true, it's true. If it weren't, you wouldn't be so angry.

MYRA: I think you're insufferable!

DAVID (*taking her hand*): Myra—dear Myra—

MYRA (*snatching it away*): Don't touch me.

DAVID: Let's have that nice little intrigue. The only reason I've been so annoying is that I love to see things as they are first, and then pretend they're what they're not.

MYRA: Words! Masses and masses of words!

DAVID: They're great fun to play with.

MYRA: I'm glad you think so. Personally, they bore me stiff.

DAVID (*catching her hand again*): Myra—don't be statuesque.

MYRA: Let go my hand!

DAVID: You're charming. (*He gets up and stands close to her.*)

MYRA (*furiously*): Let go my hand.

DAVID: I won't.

MYRA: You will!

She slaps his face hard, and he seizes her in his arms and kisses her.

DAVID (*between kisses*): You're—perfectly—sweet.

MYRA (*giving in*): David!

DAVID: You must say it's an entrancing amusement.
(*He kisses her again.*)

JUDITH appears at the top of the stairs and sees them. They break away.

JUDITH (*coming down*): Forgive me for interrupting.

DAVID: Are there any chocolates in the house?

JUDITH: No, David.

DAVID: I should like a chocolate more than anything in the world, at the moment.

JUDITH: This is a very unpleasant situation, David.

DAVID (*agreeably*): Horrible.

JUDITH: We'd better talk it all over.

MYRA (*making a movement*): I shall do nothing of the sort.

JUDITH: Please—please don't be difficult.

DAVID: I apologise, Judith.

JUDITH: Don't apologise—I quite understand.

MYRA: Please let go of my hand, David; I should like to go to bed.

JUDITH: I should stay if I were you—it would be more dignified.

DAVID: There isn't any real necessity for a scene.

JUDITH: I don't want a scene. I just want to straighten things out.

DAVID: Very well—go ahead.

JUDITH: June has always been an unlucky month for me,

MYRA: Look here, Judith, I'd like to explain one thing

JUDITH (*austerely*): I don't wish to hear any explanations or excuses—they're so cheapening. This was bound to happen sooner or later—it always does, to everybody. The only thing is to keep calm.

DAVID: I am—perfectly.

JUDITH (*sharply*): There is such a thing as being too calm.

DAVID: Sorry, dear.

JUDITH: Life has dealt me another blow, but I don't mind.

DAVID: What did you say?

JUDITH (*crossly*): I said Life had dealt me another blow, but I didn't mind.

DAVID: Rubbish.

JUDITH (*gently*): You're probably irritable, dear, because you're in the wrong. It's quite usual.

DAVID: Now, Judith—

JUDITH: Ssshhh! Let me speak—it is my right.

MYRA: I don't see why.

JUDITH (*surprised*): I am the injured party, am I not?

MYRA: Injured?

JUDITH (*firmly*): Yes, extremely injured.

DAVID (*contemptuously*): Injured!

JUDITH: Your attitude, David, is nothing short of deplorable.

DAVID: It's all nonsense—sheer, unbridled nonsense.

JUDITH: No, David, you can't evade the real issues as calmly as that. I've known for a long time—I've realised subconsciously for years that you've stopped caring for me in "that way."

DAVID (*irritably*): What do you mean—"that way"?

JUDITH (*with a wave of the hand*): Just that way. . . . It's rather tragic, but quite inevitable. I'm growing old now—men don't grow old like women, as you'll find to your cost, Myra, in a year or two. David has retained his youth astonishingly, perhaps because he has had fewer responsibilities and cares than I—

MYRA: This is all ridiculous hysteria.

DAVID (*looking at her and not liking her very much*): No, Myra—Judith is right. What are we to do?

MYRA (*furious*): Do? Nothing!

JUDITH (*ignoring her*): Do you love her truly, David?

DAVID: Madly.

MYRA (*astounded*): David!

DAVID (*intensely*): You thought just now that I was joking. Couldn't you see that all my flippancy was only a mask, hiding my real emotions—crushing them down desperately—?

MYRA (*scared*): But, David, I—

JUDITH: I knew it! The time has come for the dividing of the ways.

MYRA: What on earth do you mean?

JUDITH: I mean that I am not the sort of woman to hold a man against his will.

MYRA: You're both making a mountain out of a molehill. David doesn't love me madly, and I don't love him. It's—

JUDITH: Ssshhh!—you *do* love him. I can see it in your eyes—in your every gesture. David, I give you to her—freely and without rancour. We must all be good friends, always.

DAVID: Judith, do you mean this?

JUDITH (*with a melting look*): You know I do.

DAVID: How can we ever repay you?

JUDITH: Just by being happy. I may leave this house later on—I have a feeling that its associations may become painful, specially in the autumn—

MYRA: Look here, Judith—

JUDITH (*shouting her down*): October is such a mournful month in England. I think I shall probably go abroad—perhaps a *pension* somewhere in Italy, with cypresses in the garden. I've always loved cypresses.

DAVID: What about the children?

JUDITH: We must share them, dear.

DAVID: I'll pay you exactly half the royalties I receive from everything, Judith.

JUDITH (*bowing her head*): That's very generous of you.

DAVID: You have behaved magnificently. This is a crisis in our lives, and thanks to you—

MYRA (*almost shrieking*): Judith—I *will* speak—I—

DAVID: Ssshhh, Myra darling—we owe it to Judith to keep control of our emotions—a scene would be agonising for her now. She has been brave and absolutely splendid throughout. Let's not make things harder for her than we can help. Come, we'll go out into the garden.

MYRA: I will *not* go out into the garden.

JUDITH (*twisting her handkerchief*): Please go—I don't think I can bear any more just now.

DAVID: So this is the end, Judith?

JUDITH: Yes, my dear,—the end.

They shake hands sadly.

SIMON enters violently from the garden.

SIMON: Mother—Mother, I've got something important to tell you.

JUDITH (*smiling bravely*): Very well, dear.

SIMON: Where's Sorel.

JUDITH: In the library, I'm afraid.

SIMON (*opening library door*): Sorel, come out—I've got something vital to tell you.

DAVID (*fatherly*): You seem excited, my boy. What has happened?

SOREL (*entering with SANDY*): What's the matter?

SIMON: I wish you wouldn't all look so depressed—it's good news!

DAVID: Good news! I thought perhaps Jackie had been drowned—

SIMON: No, Jackie hasn't been drowned—she's been something else.

JUDITH: Simon, what do you mean?

SIMON (*calling*): Jackie—Jackie!

JACKIE *enters coyly from the garden.*
She has become engaged—to me!

JUDITH (*in heartfelt tones*): Simon!

SOREL: Good heavens!

JUDITH: Simon, my dear! Oh, this is too much! (*She cries a little.*)

SIMON: What on earth are you crying about, Mother?

JUDITH (*picturesquely*): All my chicks leaving the nest.
Now I shall only have my memories left. Jackie, come and kiss me.

JACKIE *goes to her.*
You must promise to make my son happy—

JACKIE (*worried*): But, Mrs. Bliss—

JUDITH: Ssshhh! I understand. I have not been a mother for nothing.

JACKIE (*wildly*): But it's not true—we don't—

JUDITH: You're trying to spare my feelings—I know—

MYRA (*furiously*): Well, I'm not going to spare your feelings, or anyone else's. You're the most infuriating set of hypocrites I've ever seen. This house is a complete feather-bed of false emotions—you're posing, self-centred egotists, and I'm sick to death of you.

SIMON: Myra!

MYRA: Don't speak to me—I've been working up for this, only every time I opened my mouth I've been mowed down by theatrical effects. You haven't got one sincere or genuine feeling among the lot of you—you're artificial to the point of lunacy. It's a great pity you ever left the stage, Judith—it's your rightful home. You can rant and roar there as much as ever you like—

JUDITH: Rant and roar! May God forgive you!

MYRA: And let me tell you this—

SIMON (*interrupting*): I'm not going to allow you to say another word to Mother—

SOREL: } You ought to be ashamed of yourself—

MYRA: } Let me speak—I will speak—

DAVID: } Look here, Myra—

JUDITH: } This is appalling—appalling!

SOREL: } You must be stark, staring mad—

MYRA: } Never again—never as long as I live—

DAVID: } You don't seem to grasp one thing that—

SIMON: Why are you behaving like this, anyhow?

In the middle of the pandemonium of everyone talking at once, RICHARD comes in from the garden. He looks

extremely apprehensive, imagining that the noise is the outcome of JUDITH's hysterical confession of their luke-warm passion. He goes to JUDITH's side, summoning all his diplomatic forces. At his entrance everyone stops talking.

RICHARD (*with forced calm*): What's happened? Is this a game?

JUDITH's face gives a slight twitch; then with a meaning look at SOREL and SIMON, she answers him.

JUDITH (*with spirit*): Yes, and a game that must be played to the finish!

SIMON (*grasping the situation*): Zara! What does this mean?

JUDITH (*in bell-like tones*): So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust—

DAVID (*collapsing on to the sofa in hysterics*): Love's whirlwind! Dear old Love's whirlwind!

SOREL: I don't understand. You and Victor—My God!

JUDITH: Hush! Isn't that little Pam crying—?

SIMON (*savagely*): She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realises her mother is a—a—

JUDITH (*shrieking*): Don't say it! Don't say it!

SOREL: Spare her that.

JUDITH: I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you, it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute Society. You have ruined my life. I have nothing left—nothing. God in heaven, where am I to turn for help . . .

SOREL (*through clenched teeth*): Is this true? Answer me—is this true?

JUDITH (*wailing*): Yes, yes!

SOREL (*springing at SIMON*): You cur!!!

JUDITH (*rushing between them*): Don't strike! He is your father! (*She totters and falls in a dead faint.*)

MYRA, JACKIE, RICHARD, and SANDY look on, dazed and aghast.

CURTAIN

ACT III

It is Sunday morning, about ten o'clock. There are various breakfast dishes on a side table, and a big table is laid down centre.

SANDY appears at the top of the stairs. On seeing no one about, he comes down quickly and furtively helps himself to eggs and bacon and coffee, and seats himself at the table. He eats very hurriedly, casting occasional glances over his shoulder. A door bangs somewhere upstairs, which terrifies him; he chokes violently. When he has recovered, he tears a bit of toast from a rack, butters it and marmalades it, and crams it into his mouth. Then, hearing somebody approaching, he darts into the library.

JACKIE comes downstairs timorously; her expression is dismal, to say the least of it. She looks miserably out of the window at the pouring rain, then, assuming an air of spurious bravado, she helps herself to some breakfast and sits down and looks at it. After one or two attempts to eat it, she bursts into tears.

SANDY opens the library door a crack, and peeps out. JACKIE, seeing the door move, screams. SANDY re-enters.

JACKIE: Oh, it's only you—you frightened me!

SANDY: What's the matter?

JACKIE (*sniffing*): Nothing.

SANDY: I say, don't cry.

JACKIE: I'm not crying.

SANDY: You were—I heard you.

JACKIE: It's this house. It gets on my nerves.

SANDY: I don't wonder—after last night.

JACKIE: What were you doing in the library just now?

SANDY: Hiding.

JACKIE: Hiding?

SANDY: Yes; I didn't want to run up against any of the family.

JACKIE: I wish I'd never come. I had horrible nightmares with all those fearful dragons crawling across the wall.

SANDY: Dragons?

JACKIE: Yes; I'm in a Japanese room—everything in it's Japanese, even the bed.

SANDY: How awful!

JACKIE: I believe they're all mad, you know.

SANDY: The Blisses?

JACKIE: Yes—they must be.

SANDY: I've been thinking that too.

JACKIE: Do you suppose they know they're mad?

SANDY: No; people never do.

JACKIE: It was Mr. Bliss asked me down, and he hasn't paid any attention to me at all. I went into his study soon after I arrived yesterday, and he said, "Who the hell are you?"

SANDY: Didn't he remember?

JACKIE: He did afterwards; then he brought me down to tea and left me.

SANDY: Are you really engaged to Simon?

JACKIE (*bursting into tears again*): Oh, no—I hope not!

SANDY: You were, last night.

JACKIE: So were you—to Sorel.

SANDY: Not properly. We talked it over.

JACKIE: I don't know what happened to me. I was in the garden with Simon, and he was being awfully sweet, and then he suddenly kissed me, and rushed into the house and said we were engaged—and that hateful Judith asked me to make him happy!

SANDY: That's exactly what happened to me and Sorel. Judith gave us to one another before we knew where we were.

JACKIE: How frightful!

SANDY: I like Sorel, though; she was jolly decent about it afterwards.

JACKIE: I think she's a cat.

SANDY: Why?

JACKIE: Look at the way she lost her temper over that beastly game.

SANDY: All the same, she's better than the others.

JACKIE: That wouldn't be very difficult.

SANDY: Hic!

JACKIE: I beg your pardon?

SANDY (*abashed*): I say—I've got hiccoughs.

JACKIE: Hold your breath.

SANDY: It was because I bolted my breakfast. (*He holds his breath.*)

JACKIE: Hold it as long as you can.

There is a pause.

SANDY (*letting his breath go with a gasp*): I can't any more—hic!

HAY FEVER

JACKIE: Eat a lump of sugar.

SANDY (*taking one*): I'm awfully sorry.

JACKIE: I don't mind—but it's a horrid feeling, isn't it?

SANDY: Horrid—hic!

JACKIE (*conversationally*): People have died from hiccoughs, you know.

SANDY (*gloomily*): Have they?

JACKIE: Yes. An aunt of mine once had them for three days without stopping.

SANDY: How beastly.

JACKIE (*with relish*): She had to have the doctor, and everything.

SANDY: I expect mine will stop soon.

JACKIE: I hope they will.

SANDY: Hic!—There!

JACKIE: Drink some water the wrong way round.

SANDY: How do you mean—the wrong way round?

JACKIE (*rising*): The wrong side of the glass. I'll show you. (*She goes to side table.*) There isn't any water.

SANDY: Perhaps coffee would do as well.

JACKIE: I've never tried coffee, but it might. (*She pours him out some.*)—There you are.

SANDY (*anxiously*): What do I do?

JACKIE: Tip it up and drink from the opposite side sort of upside down.

SANDY (*trying*): I can't reach any—

JACKIE (*suddenly*): Look out—somebody's coming. Bring it into the library—quick. . . .

SANDY: Bring the sugar—I might need it again—hic!
Oh God!

JACKIE: All right.

They go off into the library hurriedly.

RICHARD comes downstairs. He glances round a trifle anxiously, then, pulling himself together, he goes boldly to the barometer and taps it. It falls off the wall and breaks; he picks it up quickly and places it on the piano. Then he helps himself to some breakfast, and sits down.

MYRA appears on the stairs, very smart and bright.

MYRA (*vivaciously*): Good morning.

RICHARD: Good morning.

MYRA: Are we the first down?

RICHARD: No, I don't think so.

MYRA (*looking out of the window*): Isn't this rain miserable?

RICHARD: Appalling!

MYRA: Where's the barometer?

RICHARD: On the piano.

MYRA: What a queer place for it to be.

RICHARD: I tapped it, and it fell down.

MYRA: Typical of this house. (*At side table*): Are you having eggs and bacon, or haddock?

RICHARD: Haddock.

MYRA: I'll have haddock too. I simply couldn't strike out a line for myself this morning. (*She helps herself to haddock and coffee, and sits down opposite RICHARD.*) Have you seen anybody?

RICHARD: No.

MYRA: Good. We might have a little peace.

RICHARD: Have you ever stayed here before?

MYRA: No, and I never will again.

RICHARD: I feel far from well this morning.

MYRA: I'm so sorry, but not entirely surprised.

RICHARD: You see, I had the boiler room.

MYRA: How terrible!

RICHARD: The window stuck, and I couldn't open it—I was nearly suffocated. The pipes made peculiar noises all night, as well.

MYRA: There isn't any sugar.

RICHARD: Oh—we'd better ring.

MYRA: I doubt if it will be the slightest use, but we'll try.

RICHARD (*ringing and ringing bell*): Do the whole family have breakfast in bed?

MYRA: I neither know—nor care.

RICHARD: They're strange people, aren't they?

MYRA: I think "strange" is putting it mildly.

Enter CLARA.

CLARA: What's the matter?

MYRA: There isn't any sugar.

CLARA: There is—I put it 'ere myself.

MYRA: Perhaps you'd find it for us, then?

CLARA (*searching*): That's very funny. I could 'ave sworn on me Bible oath I brought it in.

MYRA: Well, it obviously isn't here now.

CLARA: Someone's taken it—that's what it is.

RICHARD: It seems a queer thing to do.

MYRA: Do you think you could get us some more?

CLARA: Oh, yes, I'll fetch you some; but mark my words, there's been some 'anky-panky somewhere. (*She goes out.*)

MYRA: Clara is really more at home in a dressing-room than a house.

RICHARD: Was she Judith's dresser?

MYRA: Of course. What other excuse could there possibly be for her?

RICHARD: She seems good-natured, but quaint.

MYRA: This haddock's disgusting.

RICHARD: It isn't very nice, is it?

Re-enter CLARA with sugar. She plumps it down.

CLARA: There you are, dear.

MYRA: Thank you.

CLARA: It's a shame the weather's changed—you might 'ave 'ad such fun up the river.

There comes the sound of a crash from the library, and a scream.

What's that? (*She opens the door.*) Come out! What are you doing?

JACKIE and SANDY enter, rather shamefaced.

JACKIE: Good morning. I'm afraid we've broken a coffee-cup.

CLARA: Was there any coffee in it?

SANDY: Yes, a good deal.

CLARA (*rushing into the library*): Oh dear! all over the carpet!

SANDY: It was my fault. I'm most awfully sorry.

CLARA reappears.

CLARA: How did you come to do it?

JACKIE: Well, you see, he had the hiccoughs, and I was showing him how to drink upside down.

MYRA: How ridiculous!

CLARA: Well, thank 'Eaven it wasn't one of the Crown Derbys. (*She goes out.*)

SANDY: They've gone now, anyhow.

JACKIE: It was the sudden shock, I expect.

SANDY (*observantly*): I say—it's raining!

MYRA: It's been raining for hours.

RICHARD: Mrs. Arundel—

MYRA: Yes?

RICHARD: What are you going to do about—about today?

MYRA: Nothing, except go up to London by the first train possible.

RICHARD: Do you mind if I come too? I don't think I could face another day like yesterday.

JACKIE: Neither could I.

SANDY (*eagerly*): Let's all go away—quietly!

RICHARD: Won't it seem a little rude if we *all* go?

MYRA: Yes it will. (*To SANDY*) You and Miss Coryton must stay.

JACKIE: I don't see why.

SANDY: I don't think they'd mind *very* much if we all went.

MYRA: Yes, they would. You must let Mr. Greatham and me get away first, anyhow. Ring for Clara. I want to find out about trains.

RICHARD: I hope they won't all come down now.

MYRA: You needn't worry about that; they're sure to roll about in bed for hours—they're such a slovenly family.

RICHARD: Have you got much packing to do?

MYRA: No; I did most of it before I came down.

Re-enter CLARA.

CLARA: What is it now?

MYRA: Can you tell me what trains there are up to London?

CLARA: When?

MYRA: This morning.

CLARA: Why?—you're not leaving, are you?

MYRA: Yes; Mr. Greatham and I have to be up by lunch-time.

CLARA: Well, you have missed the 10.15.

MYRA: Obviously.

CLARA: There isn't another till 12.30.

RICHARD: Good heavens!

CLARA: And that's a slow one. (*She goes out.*)

SANDY (*to JACKIE*): Look here; I'll take you up in my car as soon as you like.

JACKIE: All right; lovely!

MYRA: You've got a car, haven't you?

SANDY: Yes.

MYRA: Will it hold all of us?

JACKIE: You said it would be rude for us all to go. Hadn't you and Mr. Greatham better wait for the train?

MYRA: Certainly not.

RICHARD (*to SANDY*): If there is room, we should be very, very grateful.

SANDY: I think I can squeeze you in.

MYRA: Then that's settled, then.

JACKIE: When shall we start?

SANDY: As soon as you're ready.

JACKIE: Mrs. Arundel, what are you going to do about tipping Clara?

MYRA: I don't know. (*To RICHARD*) What do you think?

RICHARD: I've hardly seen her since I've been here.

JACKIE: Isn't there a housemaid or anything?

RICHARD: I don't think so.

SANDY: Is ten bob enough?

JACKIE: Each?

MYRA: Too much.

RICHARD: We'd better give her one pound ten between us.

MYRA: Very well, then. Will you do it, and we'll settle up in the car?

RICHARD: Must I?

MYRA: Yes. Ring for her.

RICHARD: You'd do it much better.

SANDY *rings the bell.*

MYRA: Oh, no, I shouldn't. (*To JACKIE*) Come on; we'll finish our packing.

JACKIE: All right.

They begin to go upstairs.

RICHARD: Here—don't leave me.

SANDY: I'll just go and look at the car. Will you all be ready in ten minutes?

MYRA: Yes, ten minutes. (*She goes off with JACKIE.*)

SANDY: Righto. (*He rushes out.*)

CLARA *re-enters.*

CLARA: 'Allo, where's everybody gone?

RICHARD: They've gone to get ready. We're leaving in Mr. Tyrell's car.

CLARA: A bit sudden, isn't it?

RICHARD (*pressing money into her hand*): This is from all of us, Clara. Thank you very much for all your trouble.

CLARA (*surprised*): Aren't you a dear, now! There wasn't any trouble.

RICHARD: There must have been a lot of extra work.

CLARA: One gets used to that 'ere.

RICHARD: Good-bye, Clara. (*He goes upstairs.*)

CLARA proceeds to clear away the dirty breakfast things, which she takes out. She returns with a fresh pot of coffee, and meets JUDITH coming downstairs.

JUDITH: Good morning, Clara. Have the papers come?

CLARA: Yes—I'll fetch them. (*She goes out.*)

JUDITH pours herself out some coffee, and sits down.

CLARA re-enters with papers.

JUDITH: Thank you. You've forgotten my orange juice.

CLARA: No, I 'aven't, dear; it's just outside. (*She goes out again.*)

JUDITH turns to the theatrical column of the "Sunday Times."

SOREL comes downstairs and kisses her.

SOREL: Good morning, darling.

JUDITH: Listen to this. (*She reads*) "We saw Judith Bliss in a box at the Haymarket on Tuesday, looking as lovely as ever." There now! I thought I looked hideous on Tuesday.

SOREL: You looked sweet. (*She goes to get herself some breakfast.*)

CLARA reappears, with a glass of orange juice.

CLARA (placing it in front of JUDITH): Did you see that nice bit in *The Referee*?

JUDITH: No—*The Times*.

CLARA: *The Referee's* much better. (*She finds the place and hands it to SOREL.*)

SOREL (reading): "I saw gay and colourful Judith Bliss at the Waifs and Strays Matinee last week. She was talking

vivaciously to Producer Basil Dean. 'I' sooth,' said I to myself, 'where ignorance is Bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.'"

JUDITH (*taking it from her*): Dear Referee! It's so unself-conscious.

CLARA: If you want any more coffee, ring for it. (*She goes out.*)

SOREL (*sitting down*): I wish I were sitting on a lovely South Sea island, with masses of palm trees and cocoanuts and turtles—

JUDITH: It would be divine, wouldn't it?

SOREL: I wonder where everybody is?

JUDITH (*still reading*): I wonder. . . . Mary Saunders has got another failure.

SOREL: She must be used to it by now.

SIMON *comes downstairs with a rush.*

SIMON (*kissing JUDITH*): Good morning, darling.—Look! (*He shows her a newly completed sketch.*)

JUDITH: Simon! How lovely! When did you do it?

SIMON: This morning—I woke early.

SOREL (*rising and craning over JUDITH's shoulder*): Let's see.

SIMON (*over the other shoulder*): I'm going to alter Helen's face; it's too pink.

SOREL (*laughing*): It's exactly like her.

JUDITH: What a clever son I have!

SIMON: Now then, Mother!

JUDITH: It's too wonderful—when I think of you both in your perambulators. . . . Oh dear, it makes me cry! (*She sniffs.*)

SOREL: I don't believe you ever saw us in our perambulators.

JUDITH: I don't believe I did.

DAVID *comes downstairs.*

DAVID (*hilariously*): It's finished!

JUDITH: What, dear?

DAVID: *The Sinful Woman.*

JUDITH: How splendid. Read it to us now.

DAVID: I've got the last chapter here.

JUDITH: Go on, then.

SANDY *rushes in from the front door. On seeing everyone, he halts.*

SANDY: Good morning. (*He bolts upstairs two at a time.*)

JUDITH: I seem to know that boy's face.

DAVID (*preparing to read*): Listen. You remember when Violet was taken ill in Paris?

JUDITH: Yes, dear.—Marmalade, Simon.

DAVID: Well, I'll go on from there.

JUDITH: Do, dear.

DAVID (*reading*): "Paris in spring, with the Champs Elysées alive and dancing in the sunlight; lightly dressed children like gay painted butterflies—"

SIMON (*whispering to SOREL*): What's happened to the barometer?

SOREL (*sibilantly*): I don't know.

DAVID: Damn the barometer!

JUDITH: Don't get cross, dear.

DAVID: Why can't you keep quiet, Simon, or go away!

SIMON: Sorry, Father.

DAVID: Well, don't interrupt again. . . . (*Reading*)
" . . . gay painted butterflies; the streets were thronged
with hurrying vehicles, the thin peek-peek of taxi-hooters
____"

SOREL: I love "peek-peek."

DAVID (*ignoring her*): "—seemed to merge in with the other vivid noises weaving a vast pattern of sound which was Paris. Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue St. Honoré into the Place de la Concorde—"

JUDITH: She couldn't have.

DAVID: Why?

JUDITH: The Rue St. Honoré doesn't lead into the Place de la Concorde.

DAVID: Yes, it does.

SOREL: You're thinking of the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, Father.

DAVID: I'm not thinking of anything of the sort.

JUDITH: David darling, don't be obstinate.

DAVID (*hotly*): Do you think I don't know Paris as well as you do?

SIMON: Never mind. Father's probably right.

SOREL: He isn't right—he's wrong!

DAVID: Go on with your food, Sorel.

JUDITH: Don't be testy, David: it's a sign of age.

DAVID (*firmly*): "Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue St. Honoré into the Place de la Concorde—"

JUDITH: That sounds absolutely ridiculous. Why don't you alter it?

DAVID: It isn't ridiculous; it's perfectly right.

JUDITH: Very well, then; get a map, and I'll show you.

SIMON: We haven't got a map.

DAVID (*putting his MS. down*): Now, look here, Judith

—here's the Rue Royale—(*He arranges the butterdish and marmalade-pot*)—here's the Crillon Hotel, and here's the Rue St. Honoré—

JUDITH: It isn't—it's the Boissy d'Anglas.

DAVID: That runs parallel with the Rue de Rivoli.

JUDITH: You've got it all muddled.

DAVID (*loudly*): I have *not* got it all muddled.

JUDITH: Don't shout. You have.

SIMON: Why not let Father get on with it?

JUDITH: It's so silly to get cross at criticism—it indicates a small mind.

DAVID: Small mind my foot!

JUDITH: That was very rude. I shall go to my room in a minute.

DAVID: I wish you would.

JUDITH (*outraged*): David!

SOREL: Look here, Father, Mother's right—here's the Place de la Concorde—

SIMON: Oh, shut up, Sorel.

SOREL: Shut up yourself, you pompous little beast.

SIMON: You think you know such a lot about everything, and you're as ignorant as a frog.

SOREL: Why a frog?

JUDITH: I give you my solemn promise, David, that you're wrong.

DAVID: I don't want your solemn promise, because I know I'm right.

SIMON: It's no use arguing with Father, Mother.

SOREL: Why isn't it any use arguing with Father?

SIMON: Because you're both so pig-headed!

DAVID: Are you content to sit here, Judith, and let your son insult me?

JUDITH: He's your son as well as mine.

DAVID: I begin to doubt it.

JUDITH (*bursting into tears of rage*): David!

SIMON (*consoling her*): Father, how can you!

DAVID (*rising*): I'll never attempt to read any of you anything again as long as I live. You're not a bit interested in my work, and you don't give a damn whether I'm a success or a failure.

JUDITH: You're dead certain to be a failure if you cram your books with inaccuracies.

DAVID (*hammering the table with his fist*): *I am not inaccurate!*

JUDITH: Yes, you are; and you're foul-tempered and spoilt.

DAVID: Spoilt! I like that! Nobody here spoils me—you're the most insufferable family to live with—

JUDITH: Well, why in Heaven's name don't you go and live somewhere else?

DAVID: There's gratitude!

JUDITH: Gratitude for what, I'd like to know?

SOREL: Mother, keep calm.

JUDITH: Calm! I'm furious.

DAVID: What have you got to be furious about? Everyone rushing around adoring you and saying how wonderful you are—

JUDITH: I am wonderful, Heaven knows, to have stood you for all these years.

SOREL: Mother, do sit down and be quiet.

SIMON: How dare you speak to Mother like that!

During this scene MYRA, JACKIE, RICHARD and SANDY creep downstairs, with their bags, unperceived by the family. They make for the front door.

JUDITH (*wailing*): Oh, oh! To think that my daughter should turn against me!

DAVID: Don't be theatrical.

JUDITH: I'm not theatrical—I'm wounded to the heart.

DAVID: Rubbish—rubbish—rubbish!

JUDITH: Don't say Rubbish to me!

DAVID: I will say Rubbish!

SOREL: } Ssshhh, Father!

SIMON: } That's right! Be the dutiful daughter and encourage your father——

DAVID: } Listen to me, Judith——

JUDITH: Oh, this is dreadful—dreadful!

SOREL: } The whole thing doesn't really matter in the least——

SIMON: } —to insult your mother——

DAVID: } The Place de la Concorde——

JUDITH: } I never realised how small you were, David.
 You're tiny——

The universal pandemonium is suddenly broken by the front door slamming. There is dead silence for a moment, then the noise of a car is heard.

SOREL runs and looks out of the window.

SIMON: There now!

SOREL: They've all gone!

JUDITH (*sitting down*): How very rude!

DAVID (*also sitting down*): People really do behave in the most extraordinary manner these days——

JUDITH: Come back and finish your breakfast, Sorel.

SOREL: All right. (*She sits down.*)

SIMON: Toast, please, Sorel.

SOREL (*passing it to him*): Here.

JUDITH: Go on, David; I'm dying to hear the end—

DAVID (*reading*): "Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano,
swept out of the Rue Boissy d'Anglas into the Place
Vendome—"

JUDITH: I meant to tell you before, David—I've made
a great decision.

DAVID (*amiably*): What is it?

JUDITH: I really am going to return to the stage!

CURTAIN

BITTER SWEET

TO

MY VERY DEAR FRIENDS

LYNN FONTANNE

AND

ALFRED LUNT

"BITTER SWEET" was first performed at His Majesty's Theatre on July 18, 1929, with the following as the principal cast:

THE MARCHIONESS OF SHAYNE	PEGGY WOOD
DOLLY CHAMBERLAIN	DOROTHY BOYD
LORD HENRY JEKYLL	WILLIAM HARN
VINCENT HOWARD	BILLY MILTON
SARAH MILLICK	PEGGY WOOD
CARL LINDEN	GEORGE METAXA
MRS. MILLICK	ELAINE INESCOURT
HUGH DEVON	ROBERT NEWTON
VICTORIA	JOSIE FEARON
HARRIET	MAIE DRAGE
GLORIA	ROSE HIGNELL
HONOR	ISLA BEVAN
JANE	EILEEN CAREY
EFFIE	MARY POUNDS
LOTTE	MILLIE SIM
FREDA	BETTY HUNTLEY WRIGHT
HANSI	MARJORIE ROGERS
GUSSI	NORAH HOWARD
MANON (LA CREVETTE)	IVY ST. HELIER
CAPTAIN AUGUST LUTTE	AUSTIN TREVOR
HERR SCHLICK	CLIFFORD HEATHERLEY

The play produced by NOEL COWARD.

ACT I

SCENE I

CHARACTERS

THE MARCHIONESS OF SHAYNE
DOLLY CHAMBERLAIN
LORD HENRY JEKYLL
VINCENT HOWARD
NITA
HELEN
JACKIE
FRANK
PARKER
GUESTS, MUSICIANS, ETC.

The scene is LADY SHAYNE's house in Grosvenor Square.

The Year is 1929.

ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is LADY SHAYNE's house in Grosvenor Square. There is a small dance in progress. At the back of the stage in the centre are large double doors leading into the supper room. On the left-hand side is a small jazz band which is playing in front of the open windows. On the right-hand side a smaller door opens into the library. When the curtain rises the stage is crowded with DANCERS and the conversation and laughter combined with the band music should give an effect almost of pandemonium. The music comes to an end with the usual flourish and there is a smattering of applause from the DANCERS. PARKER throws open the double doors at the back and announces supper. Everyone goes in laughing and talking and can be seen taking their places at small tables. The double doors are closed and the members of the band retire on to the balcony for a little fresh air, with the exception of VINCENT HOWARD, who remains at the piano improvising syncopations softly. DOLLY CHAMBERLAIN and HENRY JEKYLL come in from the library. DOLLY is pretty and attractive, about twenty. HENRY is a trifle older and inclined to be faintly pompous.

DOLLY: They've all gone in to supper—come on.

HENRY: It's damned hot.

DOLLY: You've been grumbling about one thing and another all the evening.

HENRY: Sorry, old darling.

DOLLY: Do you think you love me really?

HENRY: Of course. Don't be an ass.

DOLLY: Enough?

HENRY: Enough for what?

DOLLY: Oh, I don't know—enough to spend your life with me, I suppose.

HENRY: It's a little late to worry about that now—with the wedding next Monday.

VINCENT strikes a chord with some viciousness.

DOLLY looks sharply over her shoulder at him.

DOLLY: You're right, it is hot.

HENRY: Where's Lady Shayne?

DOLLY (pointing to supper room): In there, I expect.

HENRY: Strange old girl.

DOLLY: I hope I shall be like that when I'm seventy.

HENRY: She can't be as much as that.

DOLLY: She is—she was at school with my grandmother.

HENRY: Good God!

DOLLY: It must be funny to look back over so many years. I wonder if she minds.

HENRY: Minds what?

DOLLY: Being old, of course—to have led such a thrilling life and then suddenly to realise there's nothing left to look forward to.

HENRY: Well, she certainly is a gay old bird.

DOLLY: Henry! (She looks at him almost shocked.)

HENRY: What?

DOLLY: How silly that sounds—A gay old bird.

HENRY: Well, it's true, isn't it?—That's what she is, always travelling around and giving parties and staying up all night—it's almost indecent—I wouldn't like to see my grandmother going on like that.

DOLLY: Well, you needn't worry. (*She laughs.*)

HENRY: How do you mean?

DOLLY: All your relations are too pompous to enjoy anything.

HENRY: Dolly!

DOLLY: Well, they are—they've all got several feet in the grave, there's no life left in them, if ever there was any, which I doubt—you'll probably be like that too in a few years.

HENRY: You think Lady Shayne's life has been thrilling, do you? (*He smiles superciliously.*) That's funny.

DOLLY: Yes, I do—I do—and it isn't so funny either.

HENRY: Now look here, Dolly, if you knew some of the things about Lady Shayne that *I* know——

DOLLY: I know more than you know—I know that she justified her existence—she lived for something——

HENRY: She was thoroughly immoral in her youth—lovers and awful second-rate people round her all the time. It was lucky for her she met Shayne and got back.

DOLLY: Got back to what?

HENRY: Decent people—society.

DOLLY: Oh, dear. I can laugh now.

HENRY: Now Dolly, my girl—I——

DOLLY (*suddenly with vehemence*): Shut up—shut up—go away from me—you're pompous and silly and I can't bear it——

HENRY: Dolly!

DOLLY (*wildly*): Go away—go away!

HENRY: You're impossible.

He stamps off into the supper room.

VINCENT: Can I stop playing now?

DOLLY (*in a stifled voice*): No—go on.

VINCENT: I can't bear it much longer—darling.

DOLLY: Vincent—don't.

VINCENT: Please come over here and sit close to me.

DOLLY: I'd better not, I think.

VINCENT: Afraid?

DOLLY: Yes. (*She goes over and sits beside him—he goes on playing.*)

VINCENT: I love you so.

DOLLY: Oh, God! I'm so utterly, utterly miserable.
(*She buries her head in her arms.*)

VINCENT: Don't cry—you're going to marry a rich man and have rich friends and a rich house and rich food, and some day if you're really rich enough you'll be able to engage me to come and play for you. (*He laughs bitterly.*)

DOLLY: How can you be so horrid!

VINCENT: You'll be safe anyhow.

DOLLY: I don't want to be safe.

VINCENT: Come away with me then—I've got no money—nothing to offer you—you'd look fine singing my songs in some cheap cabaret somewhere—and living in third-rate hotels and just—well, earning your living—

DOLLY: It sounds marvellous.

VINCENT: Don't be a damned fool!

DOLLY: Vincent—

VINCENT: It's hell—— (*He stops playing and goes towards the window.*)

DOLLY: Where are you going?

VINCENT: To call the boys—we've got to work somemore.

DOLLY: I shan't see you again until—until—after I'm married.

VINCENT: Never mind—safety first.

DOLLY: What am I to do?—

VINCENT: Good-bye, you poor little kid——

He suddenly takes her in his arms and kisses her. She twines her arms round his neck and they stand there clasped tight. LADY SHAYNE enters from the supper room. She watches them silently for a moment. She is seventy years old, but her figure is still slim; her hair is snow-white, and her gown is exquisite.

LADY S.: Dolly!

DOLLY and VINCENT break away from one another. I come on an errand of peace from your fiancé. If it is inopportune, I apologise.

DOLLY: Oh, Lady Shayne.

LADY S. (*to VINCENT*): You are the piano player in the band, aren't you?

VINCENT: I'm the leader of the band.

LADY S.: What a pity! It's not a very good band.

VINCENT: I'm sorry for what happened just now, your ladyship. It—it was an accident.

LADY S.: In what way—an accident?

VINCENT: I—er—we were saying good-bye.

LADY S.: Your drummer is too loud, and I can't bear the man who plays the saxophone.

DOLLY: Lady Shayne—I—let me explain.

LADY S.: When a man plays off key the only explanation is that he is a bad musician.

DOLLY: Lady Shayne—I love Vincent and—and he loves me.

LADY S.: And this is Vincent?

DOLLY: Yes, of course.

LADY S.: And Henry, your future husband, is in there—practically weeping into the cold asparagus.

VINCENT: You're laughing at us—your ladyship.

LADY S.: I laugh at almost everything now—it's only when one is very old indeed that one can see the joke all the way round.

DOLLY: What joke?

LADY S.: Life and death and happiness and despair and love. (*She laughs again.*)

VINCENT: Don't laugh like that, please—your ladyship.

LADY S.: So you're a musician—an amiable, sensitive-looking young man—and you've been making love to this child—or has she been making love to you?—everything seems to have changed round lately.

VINCENT: It just happened—we—at least that is—I don't know.

LADY S.: Are you a married man?

VINCENT: No—of course not.

LADY S.: Well, you needn't be so vehement. I merely thought you might have forgotten—

VINCENT: My intentions are quite honourable, if presumptuous.

DOLLY: Are you angry?

LADY S.: Not in the least, my dear. What do you intend to do?

DOLLY: I don't know.

LADY S.: Well, if I were you I should make up my mind.
(She turns towards the supper room.)

DOLLY: You are angry.

LADY S.: I detest indecision.

DOLLY: I don't understand—

Several people come out of the supper room, including NITA and HELEN.

NITA: Dolly—what have you been doing to Henry—he's plunged in gloom.

HELEN: He's sending out thought waves of depression and I got the lot, being next to him.

JACKIE rushes out of the supper room with FRANK and several others.

JACKIE: What's happened to the band? Oh, Mr. Howard, play something—play something romantic—I want to dance.

LADY S. (*laughing*): Yes—play something romantic.

VINCENT (*savagely*): I'll play anything anybody wants—that's what I'm hired for—(*He goes to the piano.*) Here's romance for you—how's this—

He plays a swift jazz tune. Everyone begins to dance and jig about. NITA Charlestons a few steps, while HELEN and JACKIE clap their hands and sing. Suddenly LADY SHAYNE stamps her foot sharply.

LADY S.: Stop—stop—it's hideous—you none of you know anything or want anything beyond noise and speed—your dreams of romance are nightmares. Your conception of life grotesque. Come with me a little—I'll show you—listen—listen—

FRANK (*softly*): Oh, God, what's the old girl up to now.

DOLLY: Be quiet.

LADY SHAYNE begins to sing—everyone squats down on the floor, some of them giggling furtively. VINCENT and DOLLY stare at her as though transfixed.

“THE CALL OF LIFE”

LADY S.: Your romance could not live the length of a day,

You hesitate and analyse,

Betray your love with compromise,

Till glamour fades away;

And all too soon you realise

That there is nothing left to say.

CHORUS: Hey, hey—hey, hey,

How does she get that way;

She'd be more light-hearted

If she started—to Charleston;

She's never danced it,

She's never chanced it;

Perhaps her muscles are disinclined,

Perhaps she hasn't the strength of mind.

LADY S.: Love that's true can mean naught to you
but a name,

A thing that isn't part of you;

Can never touch the heart of you;

It's nothing but a game,

A fire without a flame.

MEN: We find it difficult to grasp your meaning.

LADY S.: Maybe the past is intervening.

CHORUS: We very much regret that times have changed
so,

Life is more speedily arranged so.

LADY S.: In your world of swiftly turning wheels
Life must be extremely grey.

CHORUS: We've no time to waste on Love Ideals,
That which to our senses most appeals
Is all we can obey.

LADY S.: No—no. Not so;
There must be something further on,
A vision you can count upon,
To help you to acquire
A memory when Youth is gone
Of what was once your heart's desire.

There is a call that echoes sweetly
When it is Spring and Love is in the air;
Whate'er befall, respond to it completely,
Tho' it may bring you sadness and despair;
Fling far behind you
The chains that bind you,
That love may find you
In joy or strife;
Tho' Fate may cheat you,
And defeat you,
Your Youth must answer to the Call of Life.

*The lights slowly go out, and through the darkness
her voice grows sweeter and younger, until presently
the lights go up again and disclose a young girl of about*

BITTER SWEET

seventeen standing demurely in a prim Victorian room with spring sunlight flooding through the windows behind her. Seated beside her at an Erard grand pianoforte is a young MUSIC MASTER—he is playing the piano, but his eyes are gazing up at her face and he is smiling a trifle wistfully as she comes to the end of the song.

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE II

CHARACTERS

SARAH MILLICK
CARL LINDEN
MRS. MILLICK
HUGH DEVON

The scene is the MILLICK's house in Belgrave Square.

The Year is 1875.

ACT I

SCENE II

When SARAH finishes singing, CARL allows his hands to drop from the keys, and still gazing into her eyes, he speaks:

CARL: That was excellent, Miss Sarah—you are improving in a very marked manner.

SARAH (*demurely*): Thank you.

CARL: I wrote that song for you when I was sixteen years old.

SARAH: But, Mr. Linden, that cannot be true—we have only known each other during the past year.

CARL: I mean that I wrote it for someone like you.

SARAH (*quickly*): Oh!

CARL: Not a real person—just an ideal in my mind, someone young and charming—holding out her arms as you did just now—expectantly.

SARAH: Expectant of what, Mr. Linden?

CARL (*hopelessly turning away*): I don't know.

SARAH: I think it is the loveliest song I ever heard.

CARL (*looking at her again*): Do you?

SARAH (*meeting his eyes*): Yes—of course.

CARL: You took the high note too much at the back of your throat.

SARAH: I'm sorry.

CARL: It doesn't matter.

SARAH: Oh, but, surely it does.

CARL: Nothing matters but just these few moments.

SARAH: Why do you say that, Mr. Linden?

CARL: Because it's spring, and I—I—

SARAH: Yes?

CARL: I fear I am talking nonsense.

SARAH (*smiling*): Perhaps a little.

CARL: We have festivals in the spring in my country—and the young boys and girls dance and their clothes are brightly coloured, glinting in the sun, and the old people sit round under the trees, watching and tapping their sticks on the ground and reviving in their hearts memories of when they, too, were young and in love.

SARAH: In love.

CARL: Yes—as you are in love with your handsome Mr. Devon.

SARAH: Oh—Hugh—yes, of course. Tell me more about your country, Mr. Linden.

CARL: There is nothing to tell really—it seems so very far away—I've almost forgotten.

SARAH: You're homesick though, I can see you are.

CARL: Can you?

SARAH: Perhaps it's the climate here, it *is* depressing—

CARL: Yes, a little (*He sings.*)

Tho' there may be beauty in this land of yours,

Skies are very often dull and grey;

If I could but take that little hand of yours,

Just to lead you secretly away.

We would watch the Danube as it gently flows,
Like a silver ribbon winding free;
Even as I speak of it my longing grows,
Once again my own dear land to see.
If you could only come with me,
If you could only come with me.

SARAH: Oh, Mr. Linden.

CARL: Yes.

SARAH: How very strange everything is to-day.

CARL: Will you forgive me, Miss Sarah, when I tell you that I shall be unable to play at your wedding reception.

SARAH (*disappointed*): Oh!

CARL: I must go away on that day—to Brussels.

SARAH: Brussels?

CARL (*hurriedly*): Yes, a concert—I have to play at a concert—it is very important.

SARAH: I understand.

CARL: Do you?

SARAH: Yes—but it is very, very disappointing.

CARL: But I am deeply grateful for the honour you have done me in asking me.

SARAH (*lightly, but turning away*): This is the last time we shall meet then for ever so long.

CARL: To-night—I am playing to-night for the dance.

SARAH: But that is different. There will be so many people—

CARL: This is indeed the last time we shall be alone together.

SARAH (*looking down*): Yes.

CARL: You have been a charming pupil—I shall always look back on these months with happiness.

SARAH: Happiness?

CARL: And sadness too.

SARAH: Oh, dear.

CARL: There are tears in your eyes.

SARAH: In yours also.

CARL: I know—I am sorry to be so foolish.

SARAH: Dear Mr. Linden—

She gives him her hand, he kisses it fervently, then pulls himself together with a tremendous effort.

CARL: Once more now—your exercises—just once more through.

SARAH (*tearfully*): Very well.

CARL strikes a chord—SARAH sings up and down, saying “Ah.” Suddenly a barrel organ strikes up in the street outside a sugary sentimental melody. SARAH perseveres with her exercises, then CARL begins to sing to her, accompanied by the orchestra, with the barrel organ as a background.

“I’LL SEE YOU AGAIN”

CARL: Now Miss Sarah, if you please,
Sing a scale for me.

SARAH: Ah—Ah—Ah—

CARL: Take a breath and then reprise
In a different key.

SARAH: Ah—Ah—Ah—

CARL: All my life I shall remember knowing you,
All the pleasure I have found in showing you

The different ways
That one may phrase
The changing light, and changing shade;
Happiness that must die,
Melodies that must fly,
Memories that must fade,
Dusty and forgotten by and by.

SARAH: Learning scales will never seem so sweet again
Till our Destiny shall let us meet again.

CARL: The will of Fate
May come too late.

SARAH: When I'm recalling these hours we've had
Why will the foolish tears
Tremble across the years,
Why shall I feel so sad,
Treasuring the memory of these days
Always?

CARL: I'll see you again,
Whenever Spring breaks through again;
Time may lie heavy between,
But what has been
Is past forgetting.

SARAH: This sweet memory,
Across the years will come to me;
Tho' my world may go awry,
In my heart will ever lie,
Just the echo of a sigh.

Good-bye.

MRS. MILLICK enters with HUGH DEVON. During
the ensuing scene until CARL's exit, the love theme
should be continued in the orchestra very softly.

MRS. M.: Darling child—your lesson should have been over a quarter of an hour ago. There is so much to be done—I declare I'm nearly frantic—Hugh has been telling me about his aunt—poor Lady Ettleworth, she developed acute gastritis yesterday evening, and it may mean postponing the wedding, and on the other hand it may not. I'm certain it was the peas she ate at lunch here. They were like bullets. Good afternoon, Mr. Linden.

CARL (*bowing*): Good afternoon, Mrs. Millick.

HUGH: Good afternoon.

CARL (*bowing*): Good afternoon.

HUGH: You look tired, Sarah.

SARAH: I am a little—I—it is quite hot to-day.

MRS. M.: I fear I must hurry you away, Mr. Linden—Sarah has a dressmaker at four-thirty—and there is so much to be done.

CARL: I quite understand.

MRS. M.: Doubtless Sarah will resume her lessons with you when she is settled down in her new home.

SARAH: Mother—I—

MRS. M.: It will be an occupation—I always believe in young married women having an occupation.

CARL: I should have thought being married would be sufficient.

MRS. M. (*slightly scandalised*): Mr. Linden—

CARL (*bitterly*): Your daughter must learn from someone else when she is a young married woman, Mrs. Millick. I shall not be here.

MRS. M.: Well, I'm sure I'm very sorry, I—

CARL (*looking fixedly at SARAH*): I shall be far away in my own country—but each year when spring comes

round again, I shall remember you, Miss Sarah, and what a charming pupil you were, and how, although you sometimes sang your top notes from the back of your throat, and your middle notes through your nose, you always sang your deep notes from your heart.

MRS. M.: My dear Mr. Linden!

CARL: This is good-bye, Miss Sarah, except for to-night, when there will be so many people—too many people.

*He bows abruptly and goes out. The music swells loudly in the orchestra, the theme of *The Call of Life*. SARAH begins to sing it brokenly. HUGH advances towards her, but she pushes him away and falls weeping into her mother's arms as the lights fade out.*

CURTAIN

ACT I
SCENE III

CHARACTERS

SARAH MILLICK
CARL LINDEN
MRS. MILLICK
HUGH DEVON
LADY DEVON
SIR ARTHUR FENCHURCH
VICTORIA
HARRIET
GLORIA
HONOR
JANE
EFFIE
THE MARQUIS OF STEERE
LORD EDGAR JAMES
LORD SORREL
MR. VALE
MR. BETHEL
MR. PROUTIE
FOUR FOOTMEN
GUESTS, MUSICIANS, ETC.

The scene is the ballroom of the MILLICK's house in Belgrave Square.

The Year is 1875.

ACT I

SCENE III

It is the ballroom of the MILLICK's house in Belgrave Square. There are three windows at the back opening on to a balcony overlooking the Square. On the left at an angle are double doors opening on to the landing and staircase. On the right is a small dais upon which the orchestra is playing, conducted by CARL LINDEN. Below this double doors lead into the supper room and on the left below the big doors is a small door leading into the drawing-room. There are coloured lights festooned over the balcony which look charming against the shadowy trees in the Square.

When the curtain rises, the ball is nearly over. A mazurka is in progress: the dresses of the guests are almost entirely pastel shades with the exception of a few chaperons in black and grey and purple, who are seated on small chairs and sofas below the orchestra. At the end of the mazurka most of the couples leave the floor; some go out on to the balcony, some into the supper room, and some into the drawing-room.

LADY DEVON, an imposing dowager, meets MRS. MILLICK as she billows in from the supper room.

LADY D.: Charming, Violet—quite delightful—I congratulate you.

MRS. M.: The young people seem very happy, I think.

LADY D.: I thought Sarah looked radiant but a trifle flushed when she was waltzing with Hugh a little while ago.

MRS. M.: She has been flushed all the evening. I hope she isn't feverish—I feel quite disturbed about her.

LADY D.: I feel sure you have no cause to be—she was positively hilarious in the supper room.

MRS. M.: Unnaturally so.

LADY D.: She is in love, my dear.

HUGH *enters from the supper room.*

HUGH (*in harassed tones*): Oh, there you are.

LADY D. (*fondly*): Happy boy.

HUGH: I am very worried.

MRS. M.: Why—what has happened?

HUGH: Sarah is behaving in a most peculiar manner—she upset a full glass of claret cup over Sir Arthur Fen-church and laughed.

MRS. M.: Laughed!

LADY D.: Sir Arthur—Good heavens!

SIR ARTHUR *enters, a pompous-looking old gentleman. He is obviously restraining a boiling fury with a great effort. His shirt-front is claret-stained and his manner frigid.*

SIR A. (*bowing to Mrs. MILLICK furiously, but politely*): A delightful evening, Mrs. Millick—thank you a thousand times.

MRS. M.: But, Sir Arthur—you mustn't think of going.

SIR A.: I couldn't think of staying—so many fresh young people enjoying themselves so very thoroughly—I feel out of place.

LADY D.: But, Sir Arthur—

SIR A. (*firmly*): Good night, Lady Devon. Good night, Mrs. Millick. (*To HUGH*) My boy—I sincerely *hope* your marriage will be a happy one.

MRS. M.: Well!

HUGH: There now.

LADY D.: How very, very unfortunate.

SARAH enters from the supper room; she looks lovely, but her manner is strained and almost defiant.

SARAH: Has he gone?

MRS. M.: Sarah—I'm ashamed of you.

SARAH: He patted my hand, mamma, then he patted my head. I detest being patted.

HUGH: He's one of the most influential men in London.

MRS. M.: And so kind.

SARAH: And so pompous.

LADY D.: Sarah!

MRS. M.: The first thing to-morrow morning you shall write him a letter of apology.

She moves away with LADY DEVON.

SARAH: To-morrow is so far away. (*She laughs.*)

HUGH: I don't understand you to-night, Sarah.

SARAH: I don't think I quite understand myself.

HUGH: Why did you cry this afternoon in the music room?

SARAH: Are you glad you are going to marry me, Hugh?

HUGH: Why did you cry like that?

SARAH: And will you be kind to me—always?

HUGH: You haven't answered me.

SARAH: And do you love me?

HUGH (*irritably*): Sarah!

SARAH: Do you?

HUGH: Of course I do—what is the matter with you?

CARL LINDEN stands up on the orchestra dais where the band have been regaling themselves with refreshments, and very softly plays on the violin "I'll See You Again." SARAH starts and then begins to laugh hysterically.

SARAH: Don't look so solemn, Hugh—I'm in love.

HUGH: My dear girl, that's all very well—

SARAH: Is it?

HUGH: But you really must restrain yourself.

SARAH (*almost rudely*): What a stupid tune, Mr. Linden—so dismal—

HUGH: Sarah!

SARAH (*peremptorily*): Play something gay, please—immediately.

HUGH (*softly*): Sarah, you must not speak like that—have you taken leave of your senses?

SARAH (*vehemently*): Let me alone—please go away—let me alone!

HUGH goes angrily on to the balcony. CARL strikes up a tremendously gay melody.

"WHAT IS LOVE?"

Play something gay for me,
Play for me, play for me;
Set me free,
I am in a trance to-night,
Can't you see
How I want to dance to-night?
Madly my heart is beating,
Some insane melody possessing me,
In my brain thrilling and obsessing me;

How can I leave it to call in vain?
Is it joy or pain?

Live your life, for Time is fleeting,
Some insistent voice repeating;
Hear me—hear me,
How can I leave it to call in vain?
Is it joy or pain?

Refrain

Tell me—tell me—tell me, what is love?
Is it some consuming flame;

Part of the moon, part of the sun,
Part of a dream barely begun?
When is the moment of breaking-waking?
Skies change, nothing is the same,
Some strange magic is to blame;

Voices, that seem to echo round me and above,
Tell me, what is love, love, love?

Play something gay for me,
Play for me—play for me;

Tell me why
Spring has so enchanted me,
Why this shy
Passion has so enchanted me,
Passion has been granted me;
Am I awake or dreaming?

Far and near
Every lover follows you,
Swift and clear,
Flying as the swallows do;

Leave me no longer to call in vain,
Are you joy or pain?

Leave me not by Love forsaken,
If I sleep, then let me waken;
Hear me—hear me,
Leave me no longer to call in vain
Are you joy or pain?

Repeat Refrain

SARAH begins to waltz round the stage by herself, and as she passes the supper room, the library and the balcony, GUESTS join her in her dance, until the whole stage is encircled by a wheel of young people laughing and chattering. At the end of this, the band plays "God Save the Queen"; everyone naturally stands still, and then the party breaks up. SARAH takes her place at the door with her mother, in order to bid good-bye to the GUESTS. The MUSICIANS are packing up their instruments, and finally all go out, including CARL. HUGH comes in from the balcony. SARAH leaves her mother talking to some GUESTS and runs up to him.

SARAH: I'm sorry, Hugh.

HUGH (*stiffly*): It doesn't matter.

SARAH: Oh, but it does—I was unkind and silly.

HUGH: It doesn't matter.

SARAH: Will you please forgive me?

HUGH: There is nothing to forgive.

SARAH: I shall be bad again if you are so polite.

HUGH: My dear Sarah!

SARAH (*desperately*): Are you always going to be like

this—after we are married, I mean—cold and unbending?

HUGH: I can only hope you are not often going to behave as you have to-night.

SARAH: Oh, dear.

HUGH: I don't feel that you realise yet the dignity of the position you will hold as my wife.

SARAH: I am not your wife yet.

HUGH: I enjoy being high-spirited as much as anyone.

SARAH: Do you?

HUGH: But there is a time and place for everything.

SARAH: Then I can look forward to us being very high-spirited when we are alone—when no one is looking—you might wear a funny hat at breakfast.

HUGH: I am very fond of you, my dear, but you must remember I am older than you.

SARAH: Not so very much.

HUGH: And it is part of my profession to consider appearances.

SARAH: Diplomatically speaking.

HUGH: Are you laughing at me?

SARAH: No, but I'm looking at you—just as though I had never seen you before.

LADY DEVON enters.

LADY D.: Hugh, dear.

HUGH: Yes, mother?

LADY D.: I have been waiting for you downstairs. The carriage is at the door. Good night, Sarah.

SARAH: Good night. I have been telling Hugh I was sorry to have behaved so badly.

LADY D. (*smiling*): I am afraid you're marrying a tomboy, Hugh.

SARAH: No, no—I won't be one any more.

LADY D.: Dear child. (*She kisses her.*) Come, Hugh. (*She moves over to MRS. MILLICK at the door.*)

HUGH: Good night, Sarah.

SARAH: Good night, Hugh.

HUGH: Will you drive with me to-morrow afternoon in Regent's Park?

SARAH: Thank you—that will be delightful.

HUGH: Until to-morrow—my dear. (*He looks round carefully and then kisses her chastely and departs with LADY DEVON.*)

MRS. M.: Well, that's over. Where are the girls?

SARAH: Harriet and Gloria?

MRS. M.: Yes.

SARAH: Sitting out somewhere with Lord Edgar and Mr. Proutie.

MRS. M.: And Effie and Jane and Honor and Victoria?

SARAH: They're sitting out, too.

MRS. M.: Come with me—we must find them—really you modern young people have no sense of behaviour at all.

She goes with SARAH into the supper room while the music strikes up the introductory bars of a concerted number. HARRIET and LORD EDGAR peep round the library door and tiptoe out on to the stage. GLORIA and MR. PROUTIE do the same from the balcony—EFFIE, JANE, HONOR, VICTORIA, MR. VALE and LORD SORREL, LORD STEERE, MR. BETHEL all join them.

“THE LAST DANCE”

MEN: They've all gone now—have no fear—

GIRLS: Sarah's mother may be near,
If she should hear

ALL: She might be rather cross with us,
Elderly people make too much fuss.

MEN: Always insist on a chaperone,
Never leave love alone.

GIRLS: We feel frightened, if you please
Don't flirt or tease.

MEN: Gentle and sweet in your purity,
We give our hearts as security.

GIRLS: We shall be scolded a lot for this.

MEN: You won't miss just one kiss.

They all kiss.

GIRLS: Think of the consequences, please, you
haven't realised
What an appalling thing for us to be so
compromised,
So dreadfully, dreadfully, dreadfully com-
promised.

MEN: Everything's ending,
The moon is descending,
Behind the tall trees in the park.

GIRLS: Silence falls,
Slumber calls.

MEN: We men together
Were wondering whether
We might have a bit of a lark.

GIRLS: No jokes in the dark, please,
What sort of a lark, please?

ALL: Just a slight dance,
One more dream-of-delight dance;
Just a sort of good-night dance
Would be glorious fun.

MEN: Won't you let us, please let us, just stay for
a while,
Won't you, please won't you, be gay for a
while?

All we desire is to play for a while
Now the party's done.

GIRLS: Just a fast waltz,
Till the world seems a vast waltz;
Very often the last waltz
Is the birth of Romance.

ALL: It's a June night,
There's a thrill in the moonlight;
Let's give way to the tender surrender
Of our last dance.

At the end of the number all the men, with the exception of MR. PROUTIE, creep out, leaving the GIRLS seated demurely on gilt chairs at some distance from one another all round the stage. MR. PROUTIE, being very smitten with GLORIA, hides behind the sofa. MRS. MILLICK re-enters, looking rather agitated, followed by SARAH.

MRS. M.: Girls—where have you been?

HARRIET: Nowhere, Aunt Violet.

MRS. M.: Where is Lord Edgar?

HONOR: He went hours ago, Mrs. Millick.

MRS. M.: And Lord Steere, Mr. Bethel, Mr. Vale and Lord Sorrel?

VICTORIA (*sighing*): All gone.

MRS. M.: And Mr. Proutie?

GLORIA: He was so tired he left early.

MRS. M.: Come out from behind that sofa, Mr. Proutie.

MR. PROUTIE comes out, looking very sheepish. *All the girls giggle.* MR. PROUTIE is very young and cherubic.

MR. P.: I—I—fell asleep—I apologise.

MRS. M.: I quite understand.

MR. P. (*appealingly to GLORIA*): Miss Gloria, I——

MRS. M.: Good night, Mr. Proutie.

MR. P.: Miss Gloria said that——

MRS. M. (*sternly*): Good night, Mr. Proutie.

MR. P.: Er—er—— Good night—thank you for having me—er—good night.

He goes out, covered with embarrassment.

MRS. M.: Gloria—what does this mean?

GLORIA: Nothing, Aunt Violet.

MRS. M.: If it were not that this was a festive occasion, I should punish you severely for your deceit.

HARRIET: Dear Aunt Violet—don't be cross.

MRS. M.: To bed with the lot of you.

EFFIE: Oh, not yet—just ten minutes more.

MRS. M.: Certainly not—it's nearly one o'clock—fine bridesmaids you'll make on Thursday, if you stay up so late.

HARRIET: Won't you let us stay up just a little longer?

HONOR: Oh, Mrs. Millick, do—please do.

MRS. M.: No—Sarah's tired——

SARAH: No, I'm not, mother—I know I couldn't sleep for ages.

GLORIA: Just a short while—please!

They all cluster round her and speak at once—finally she breaks away from them.

MRS. M.: Very well—ten minutes then and no more. Sarah, come into my room and say good night.

SARAH: Yes, mother.

MRS. M.: Remember now—in ten minutes time I shall tell Parker to come and put out the lights—and don't make too much noise—

HARRIET: We won't, we promise.

GLORIA: Good night, Aunt Violet.

MRS. MILICK goes out amid a chorus of "Good nights." *The moment the door has closed upon her the girls fling aside their demure manner and dance about the stage. HARRIET jumps on to the orchestra dais and begins to strum the piano. EFFIE, HONOR and SARAH sing gaily while VICTORIA and JANE dance.*

HONOR: Oh, Sarah—I do envy you—being married and going to Paris and everything.

SARAH: Do you?

EFFIE: Aren't you dying of excitement?—I know I should be.

SARAH: No, not exactly—I feel strange somehow.

GLORIA: What sort of strange?

SARAH: I don't know—it's difficult to explain—perhaps I'm frightened.

JANE: Nobody could be frightened of Hugh.

VICTORIA: When I marry, it must be somebody just like Hugh.

HARRIET: I shall choose someone taller—more robust, you know.

EFFIE: How can you, Harriet—Hugh's just the right size.

GLORIA: I shall marry Mr. Proutie.

ALL: Gloria!—What do you mean?

GLORIA (*calmly*): He adores me.

JANE: Has he asked you?

GLORIA: Of course.

HONOR: And you said yes?

GLORIA: I said no. But that doesn't matter—he'll ask me again.

EFFIE: Are you in love with him?

GLORIA: No—not a bit.

HONOR: How *can* you, Gloria?

GLORIA: I'd much rather marry someone I didn't love really.

ALL: "Gloria!" "Really!" "You're dreadful!" "Why?"
etc.

GLORIA: Because I could manage him better.

HARRIET: I agree with Gloria.

VICTORIA: So do I.

SARAH: I don't—I want love.

EFFIE (*giggling*): So do I—but you'll get it before I do—

They all laugh.

HONOR: I mean to have a lot of babies—

JANE: I want someone to protect me always—someone strong that I can look up to—

HARRIET: Fiddlesticks!

VICTORIA: Rubbish!

GLORIA: Old-fashioned nonsense!

JANE: Let's play a game.

SARAH: What game?

EFFIE: Yes, yes—any game.

HONOR: Postman's knock.

SARAH: No—no—that means one of us going out—

JANE: How, when and where.

EFFIE: So does that.

SARAH: Let's play an exciting game—a noisy game.

HARRIET: Aunt Violet will hear.

SARAH: No—she's two floors up.

GLORIA: Blind Man's Buff.

EFFIE: Yes—yes.

SARAH: That will do—

VICTORIA: Who'll be it—

JANE: Eeny meeny miny mo—we must do eeny meeny
miny mo—

FINALE

GLORIA: Eeny meeny miny mo

HARRIET: Catch a nigger by his toe

VICTORIA: If he hollers let him go

ALL: O.U.T. spells out and so

GLORIA: Out goes she. (*She points to EFFIE.*)

EFFIE: Out goes me. (*Skipping about.*) This is
the loveliest, loveliest part of the party.

GLORIA: Eeny meeny miny mo

HARRIET: Catch a nigger by his toe

VICTORIA: If he hollers let him go

ALL: O.U.T. spells out and so

GLORIA: Out goes she. (*She points to HARRIET.*)

HARRIET: Out goes me.

She and EFFIE take hands and twirl around.

HARRIET: } Now we're free who knows who'll be
EFFIE: } he!

GLORIA: Eeny meeny miny mo

VICTORIA: Catch a nigger by his toe

SARAH: If he hollers let him go

ALL: O.U.T. spells out and so

VICTORIA: Out goes she. (*She points to GLORIA.*)

GLORIA: Out goes me. (*She joins EFFIE and HARRIET.*)

HARRIET: } This is the loveliest, loveliest part of the
EFFIE: } party.

GLORIA: }

VICTORIA: Eeny meeny miny mo

SARAH: Catch a nigger by his toe

JANE: If he hollers let him go

Out goes she. (*Points to VICTORIA.*)

VICTORIA: Out goes me. (*She joins EFFIE, HARRIET and GLORIA.*)

ALL: This is the loveliest, loveliest part of the
party.

EFFIE: } Only three of them left now we're ex-
HARRIET: } cited to see

GLORIA: } Who is going to be blind man, who's it
VICTORIA: } going to be.

SARAH: I have a strange presentiment it's me.

JANE: Eeny meeny miny mo

Out goes she. (*She points to HONOR, who joins the others.*)

BITTER SWEET

- SARAH: Eeny meeny mo
Out goes she. (*She points to JANE.*)
I'm HE—it's me
It's me—I'm HE.
- GIRLS: Just get a handkerchief and bind it around
her eyes,
- SARAH: Not too tight, not too tight.
They blindfold her.
- GIRLS: She mustn't see a thing no matter how
much she tries.
- SARAH: That's all right—that's all right.
- GIRLS: She will cheat if she can,
That corner's raised a bit,
Turn her round till she's dazed a bit,
Are you ready now,
One, two, three!
- SARAH: Since the party began,
Something's been taunting me,
Some presentiment haunting me,
What can it be?
- GIRLS: Start now—start now,
She can see the ground,
She can see the ground.
- SARAH: Somehow, somehow,
Some forgotten sound,
Some forgotten sound,
Echoes deep in my heart,
Strangely entralling me,
Someone secretly calling me,
Like a melody far away.
- GIRLS: Oh, for Heaven's sake start,

Here go along with you,
We can see nothing wrong with you,
We want to play.

They all dance about and dodge her. The door on the right opens quietly and CARL LINDEN comes into the room. He moves across to the piano and collects his music and is on his way out when SARAH clasps him round the neck. All the GIRLS laugh. CARL is staggered for a moment, drops his music, and then completely losing all restraint kisses her on the mouth. She snatches the bandage from her eyes and stares into his face. All the other GIRLS are watching aghast.

SARAH (*softly*): It's you I love—now and always.

She kisses him, then draws back and they stand there staring at one another oblivious of everything. EFFIE giggles suddenly and then stops herself.

HARRIET: Sarah—

GLORIA: Sarah—don't be silly—Sarah—

Neither CARL nor SARAH turn their heads.

CARL: Come with me—

SARAH: Now?

CARL: Yes—now—to-night.

SARAH: I'll come with you—wherever you want me to.

CARL: I love you—do you hear—I've loved you for months—for years really—ever since I was a boy I've known you were waiting for me somewhere—I'll take care of you—live for you—die for you.

SARAH: Don't say that, my darling. (*Singing*):

Should happiness forsake me,
And disillusion break me,

BITTER SWEET

Come what may,
Lead the way,
Take me, take me.
Although I may discover,
Love crucifies the lover,
Whate'er Fate has in store,
My heart is yours for evermore.

CARL (*singing*):

Oh Lady, you are far above me,
And yet you whisper that you love me,
Can this be true or is it just some foolish
dream?

SARAH (*speaking*): You know it's true, look in my eyes
—can't you see?

CARL (*speaking softly*): Oh, my dear, dear love. (*Singing*):

Now tho' your fears are sleeping,
Look well before the leaping.
Love of me
May be repaid
By weeping.
Life can be bitter learning,
When there is no returning,
Whate'er Fate has in store,
My heart is yours for evermore,
I love you—I love you—I love you.

GLORIA: You cannot realise the things you say.
You quite forget yourself, please go
away.

HARRIET: Now leave this all to me, my dear,
It's really too absurd.

EFFIE: It's quite the most romantic thing that I have ever heard!

VICTORIA (*speaking*): Effie, be quiet.

SARAH *kisses him again full on the mouth. HARRIET rushes up and drags them apart.*

HARRIET: Sarah—are you mad?—Mr. Linden, please go at once.

CARL (*smiling*): How can I go?

GLORIA: Harriet—leave this to me—

SARAH: Stop—don't say another word.

EFFIE (*rushing up hysterically*): It's the most wonderfully thrilling thing that ever happened in the world.

HARRIET: Don't be an idiot, Effie.

SARAH (*quietly*): Effie's right, Harriet.

HARRIET: I'm going straight upstairs to fetch Aunt Violet.

EFFIE (*struggling with her*): You shan't! You shan't!—They love each other—look at them—Honor, Victoria, Jane, help me!

HONOR, VICTORIA and JANE come to her assistance.

SARAH AND CARL (*singing*):

I'll see you again,

Whenever Spring breaks through again,

Always I'll be by your side,

No time or tide

Can part us ever—

VICTORIA: Shhh! Someone's coming—hide—quickly—

They all hide behind sofas and chairs,

FOUR FOOTMEN enter pompously to music.

FOOTMEN QUARTETTE

Now the party's really ended,
And our betters have ascended,
All with throbbing heads,
To their welcome beds,
Pity us, who have to be up,
Sadly clearing the debris up,
Getting for our pains,
Most of the remains.

Though the Major-Domo is a trifle tight,
Though the mistress hiccoughed when she said good
night,

We in our secluded garret,
Mean to finish up the claret-
Cup all right.

When we've doused the final candles,
We'll discuss the latest scandals
We have overheard,
Pleasure long deferred.

When the Duke of So and So stares
At his wife, we know below stairs,
While she smirks and struts,
That he hates her guts.

Though we all disguise our feelings pretty well,
What we mean by "Very good" is "Go to hell."
Though they're all so grand and pompous,
Most of them are now non compos,
Serve them right,
Good night.

They extinguish all the lights and close the windows

and go out, closing the doors behind them. All the GIRLS come out, and lastly CARL and SARAH. SARAH goes up to HARRIET. GLORIA lights two candles.

SARAH: Harriet—whatever you do won't be the slightest use—I love Carl—I'm going with him—I don't care where or how—but this is my life, you understand—my whole life—so help me—all you can—please—please—

HARRIET: Think of Hugh—you're mad.

SARAH: Perhaps I am mad, but I'm happy—can't you see—I'm really happy—

HARRIET: Mr. Linden, I appeal to you.

GLORIA: It's no use, Harriet.

HARRIET: I feel as if I were in a dream.

CARL: You are.

HARRIET: What are your prospects—have you any money?

CARL: None—no money—but I can earn enough.

SARAH: So can I—I'll sing—

VICTORIA: Sarah!

CARL: Yes—Sarah will sing and I will play and we will make a living—come, Sarah.

SARAH: Like this?

EFFIE: Quickly, Jane—your bedroom is nearest—your hat and cape.

JANE and EFFIE fly out of the room. "The Call of Life" theme plays softly. SARAH runs up to the windows and flings them open, singing. CARL joins her.

SARAH AND CARL (*singing*):

Fling far behind you
The chains that bind you,

That Love may find you
In joy or strife;
Tho' Fate may cheat you,
And defeat you,
Your youth must answer to the Call of Life.

EFFIE and JANE return with a hat and cape. They dress her in them, and she and CARL go out together. As the orchestra crashes out the final chords, the OTHERS rush to the balcony to wave.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

CHARACTERS

SARI LINDEN

CARL LINDEN

MANON (LA CREVETTE)

LOTTE

FREDA

HANSI

GUSSI

CAPTAIN AUGUST LUTTE

HERR SCHLICK

WAITERS, CLEANERS, ORCHESTRA, ETC.

The scene is HERR SCHLICK's café in Vienna.

The Year is 1880.

ACT II

SCENE I

The scene is the interior of "SCHLICK'S" café in Vienna. It is about 12 o'clock noon, and WAITERS in shirt sleeves are tidying up the tables and polishing brasses. There are also some cleaners and charwomen swabbing the floor. CARL, in shirt sleeves, is rehearsing with the Orchestra on the orchestra platform at the back. LOTTE, HANSI, and FREDA, three ladies of the town, elaborately dressed, are seated at a table down stage left. The OPENING CHORUS is sung in snatches by the WAITERS, CLEANERS, etc.

WAITERS: Life in the morning isn't too bright,
When you've had to hurry round and
carry plates all night;
And the evening isn't too gay,
When you know you've got to rise and
be at work all day.
This café merely caters
For a horde of drunken satyrs,
Why, oh why, we're waiters nobody can
say.

CLEANERS: Oh dear, it's clear to see that cleaners
lead a worse life,
Every day we curse life;

More and more

The muscles on our brawny arms like
iron bands are

Scrubbing till our hands are sore;

We scour and polish till our fingers ache.

WAITERS (*humming*): Hum—hum——!

CLEANERS: Each hour we feel as tho' our backs would
break,

WAITERS: Hum—hum!

CLEANERS: We weep and keep our growing families
as well,

Why we're here at all nobody can tell.

WAITERS: Life in the morning isn't too bright,
When you've had to hurry round and carry
plates all night.

CLEANERS: Oh dear, it's clear to see that cleaners
lead a worse life.

WAITERS: And the evening isn't too gay,
When you know you've got to rise and
be at work all day.

CLEANERS: You see the reason why each day we want
to curse life.

WAITERS: For this café merely caters

CLEANERS: Weary

WAITERS: For a horde of drunken satyrs;

CLEANERS: Dreary

WAITERS: Why, oh why, we're waiters nobody can
say.

CLEANERS: Every day.

WAITERS: Ah—Ah—Ah——

CLEANERS: Ah—Ah—Ah——

At the end of it, CARL rests his orchestra for a moment.

LOTTE: He left me at half-past ten, my dear, he kissed my hand, à la grand chevalier, which made me laugh, I must say.

FREDA: Is that all he left you with—a kiss?

LOTTE: Don't be vulgar, Freda, everything was arranged last night in his carriage—we drove round and round the Ringstrasse.

HANSI: I hope it didn't make you too giddy, dear.

LOTTE: You none of you understand, this is an "affaire de cœur," I'm sure of it.

FRITZ, a waiter, brings LOTTE a bill for the coffee and brioches they have been having.

LOTTE: It's not my turn—Hansi?

HANSI: I paid yesterday.

LOTTE: Come along, Freda—no fumbling.

FREDA: I wasn't fumbling—I was just trying to count up how many times I've paid during the last month.

HANSI: That oughtn't to take you long.

FREDA (rather crossly): Oh, here you are, then. (She gives him some money.)

He nods and goes off.

LOTTE: Where was I?

FREDA: Driving round the Ringstrasse, my dear, talking business.

LOTTE: You can all jeer if you like, but just you wait and see. Anyhow, I feel positively exhausted, having had to get up so early.

HANSI: I'm tired too.

GUSSI enters, elaborately dressed and wearing a fur tippet and muff.

GUSSI: Hallo, girls.

FREDA: Oh, my God, look at Gussi.

HANSI (*fingering the tippet*): Where did you get it?

GUSSI: Here, leave off, surely you've seen a bit of mink before?

HANSI: Not on you.

GUSSI: Well, have a good look now and enjoy it.

LOTTE: Who gave it to you?

GUSSI (*with great coyness*): I hardly like to tell you, it was such a delightful surprise—I had been spending the night with my dear old grandmother—

HANSI: I hope she took her spurs off.

They all laugh. GUSSI sits down at the table.

LOTTE: Do you want some coffee?

GUSSI: No thanks, it would spoil my lunch.

FREDA: I'm lunching at Sacher's—I can bring a friend—Hansi?

HANSI: No thank you, dear.

FREDA: Lotte?

LOTTE: Who are you lunching with, the old ostrich?

FREDA: No, he's gone to Warsaw. This is a banker—quite young, but common, no use for dinner—do you want to come?

LOTTE: I don't mind.

HANSI: I can't imagine, Freda, why you waste your time with small fry.

FREDA: I don't consider any free meal small fry.

LOTTE, FREDA and HANSI sing a trio:

"LADIES OF THE TOWN"

Though we're often accused of excessively plastic, drastic sins,
When we're asked to decide on the wrong or the right life,
Night life wins,
We know that destiny will never bring
A wedding ring about.
Our moral sense may really not be quite the thing
To fling about, sing about;
We'll achieve independence before it's too late, and
Wait and see.
What care, what care we?

Refrain

Ladies of the town,
Ladies of the town,
Though we've not a confessional air,
We have quite a professional flair,
Strolling up and down, strolling up and down,
We employ quite an amiable system
Of achieving renown,
Though the church and state abuses us,
For as long as it amuses us,
We'll remain, no matter how they frown,
Naughty, naughty, ladies of the town.

We can often behave in a very disarming, charming way,
Which can frequently add to the money we lay by,
Day by day.

If we are told of something on the Stock Exchange,
We pry a bit,
And if it's safe we get some kindly banker
To supply a bit, buy a bit,
And if later our helpers may wish to forget us,
Set us free,
What care, what care we?

Refrain

Ladies of the town, ladies of the town,
Though we're socially under a cloud,
Please forgive us for laughing aloud,
Strolling up and down, strolling up and down,
Disapproval may sometimes submerge us,
But we none of us drown,
We have known in great variety
Members of the best society,
And should we decide to settle down,
We'll be wealthy ladies of the town.

When LOTTE, FREDA and HANSI have gone off CARL addresses his orchestra on the dais.

CARL: It is lacking in colour. Strings, when you take the theme in the first refrain, bring it out, let it live and breathe, and mean something. In the last four bars I've marked a *rallentando*—Now then—

He raises his baton and the orchestra begins La Crevette's Song—as the music swells MANON enters briskly. She is, naturally, in day clothes and a hat; she listens for a moment, and then stamps her foot. CARL stops the orchestra.

MANON: No, Carl—it must be quicker there.

CARL: When we were working yesterday that was the exact spot you wanted it slower.

MANON: Listen—it starts so— (*She sings*) “Lorsque j'étais petite fille en marchant parmi les prés”— swift, staccato like that, then “J'entendis la voix d'ma tante, qui murmura à côté”— just a leetle slower—not much, you understand—

CARL: Very well. (*He starts the music again.*)

MANON stops him.

MANON: No, no, no—you are so stubborn.

CARL: Stubborn?

MANON: Yes—you are a musician, yes, but you know nothing about singers, especially when they have no voice like me.

CARL (*coming down to her*): You have a beautiful voice, Manon.

MANON (*laughing suddenly*): Now you are being earnest and sincere, it is so many years since I saw that solemn look in your eyes—

CARL: You can't expect me to pay you compliments often, when you try to quarrel with me all the time.

MANON: I quarrel! Don't be a fool.

CARL (*turning away*): It's you who are a fool—

MANON (*touching his arm, softly*): No, Carl—I was once—but I'm not any more.

CARL: What do you mean?

MANON: Where is Sari—your little English Sarah?

CARL: She will be here soon.

MANON (*mockingly*): How exciting!

CARL: You do hate her, don't you?

MANON (*gaily*): Passionately—I should like to scratch her eyes out and pull her nose off and wring her neck——

CARL: Manon!

MANON: —in a friendly way. (*She laughs again.*)

CARL: Don't laugh like that.

MANON: You used to love my laughter—it was so gay and charming, you said—I think you mentioned once that it reminded you of a bird chirruping, that was a very pretty thought, Carl——

CARL: Please go away now—I must continue my rehearsals.

MANON: Carl——

CARL: Yes.

MANON: I'm only teasing you and irritating you because I'm jealous——

CARL: But, Manon——

MANON (*holding up her hand*): No, don't protest and say I have no right to be jealous! I know that well—ours was such a silly little affair really, and so long ago, but somehow it was very sweet and it left a small sting behind——

CARL: It was your fault that it ended.

MANON: I know that too—and I'm glad—I was very proud of myself finishing it all suddenly like that—because it was for the best—I'm no good for you really—not faithful enough, and you should be free always, because you're an artist. (*She turns away.*) But now you'll never be free, so my beautiful little sacrifice was all in vain. (*She laughs.*) Go back to your work—I'll run through my words here——

CARL: Manon—I——

MANON: Please—play my music for me—I'm not sure of it yet—I'm not sure of anything.

CARL looks at her silently for a moment, and then goes thoughtfully back to the orchestra. MANON calls FRITZ and orders herself a drink. He brings it immediately and she sings her song quietly.

"IF LOVE WERE ALL"

Life is very rough and tumble,
For a humble
Disease,
One can betray one's troubles never,
Whatever
Occurs,
Night after night,
Have to look bright,
Whether you're well or ill
People must laugh their fill.
You mustn't sleep
Till dawn comes creeping.
Though I never really grumble
Life's a jumble.
Indeed—
And in my efforts to succeed
I've had to formulate a creed—

Refrain

I believe in doing what I can,
In crying when I must,
In laughing when I choose.

BITTER SWEET

Heigho, if love were all
I should be lonely.
I believe the more you love a man,
The more you give your trust,
The more you're bound to lose.
Although when shadows fall
I think if only—
Somebody splendid really needed me,
Someone affectionate and dear,
Cares would be ended if I knew that he
Wanted to have me near.
But I believe that since my life began
The most I've had is just
A talent to amuse.
Heigho, if love were all!
Tho' life buffets me obscenely,
It serenely
Goes on.
Although I question its conclusion,
Illusion
Is gone.
Frequently I
Put a bit by
Safe for a rainy day.
Nobody here can say
To what, indeed,
The years are leading.
Fate may often treat me meanly,
But I keenly
Pursue
A little mirage in the blue.
Determination helps me through.

Repeat Refrain

MANON goes off after song. CARL, at the end of MANON's song, dismisses the orchestra, who go off. He comes down from the dais, putting on his coat, when GUSSI enters.

GUSSI: Hallo, Carl.

CARL (*absently*): Hallo.

GUSSI: Like a drink?

CARL: No, thanks.

GUSSI: Are you lunching with anyone?

CARL: Yes, my wife.

GUSSI: I might have known it. (*She slips her arm through his.*) Let me know when you feel like being unfaithful to her, won't you?

CARL (*smiling*): You're bad, Gussie, thoroughly bad—go along with you.

GUSSI: Here listen, you know that dark red coat of mine?

CARL: Yes.

GUSSI: Would your Sari like it? I've had this given to me. (*She waves her muff.*) I shan't need it any more.

CARL: It's very, very sweet of you, Gussi.

GUSSI: You both look so pinched—it depresses me to look at you—bring Sarah along to lunch at my flat—

CARL: Very well.

CAPTAIN AUGUST LUTTE enters. CAPTAIN AUGUST is a debonair, imposing-looking man.

GUSSI: Just a moment, some good news has come in—come at 1.30, if I'm not back tell Liza to serve you.

CARL: But, Gussi—

GUSSI (*firmly*): Good bye, dear Carl—

CARL goes off laughing. GUSSI sidles up to CAPTAIN AUGUST.

GUSSI: Good morning.

CAPTAIN (*bowing stiffly*): Good morning.

GUSSI: Can I do anything for you?

CAPTAIN: I wish to see Herr Schlick.

GUSSI (*grimacing*): How nice.

CAPTAIN (*abruptly*): You are very pretty.

GUSSI (*shrinking away*): Oh, Captain—my salts—my salts.

CAPTAIN: Perhaps you will make a rendezvous with me for next week?

GUSSI: I may be dead next week, what's the matter with now?

CAPTAIN: I fear that I am otherwise engaged.

HERR SCHLICK enters, oily and ingratiating.

HERR S.: Captain—forgive me please—I— (Sees GUSSI.) What are you doing here?

GUSSI: Just feeding the swans— Good-bye.

She goes off.

CAPTAIN: Herr Schlick, I have a complaint to make.

HERR S.: It shall be rectified—before you say it, whatever is wrong is rectified.

CAPTAIN: Among your professional dancing partners you have been careless enough to engage an iceberg.

HERR S.: Good God!

CAPTAIN: A beautiful, alluring, unsociable iceberg—her name is Sari.

HERR S.: She is new, Captain; she has only been here a few weeks.

CAPTAIN: Even a few weeks is surely time enough

to enable her to melt sufficiently to sup with me—

HERR S.: She is English, Captain, one must make allowances.

CAPTAIN: I do not come to a café of this sort to make allowances—I come to amuse myself and to pay for it.

MANON *re-enters on the dais just above them. She is looking for CARL, but stops on hearing their voices.*

HERR S. (*very flurried*): Captain—I assure you—anything that you wish—I will arrange as soon as possible.

CAPTAIN: I wish for this Sari, to sup with me—to-night.

HERR S.: She shall, Captain, she shall.

CAPTAIN: You will please have a special supper laid ready in a quiet room—No. 7 is the best, I think—

HERR S.: You are sure that you would not rather have Lotte or perhaps Hansi—

CAPTAIN: Quite sure.

HERR S.: You see this English girl is the wife of my orchestra leader—they are said to be in love—it will be a little difficult—

CAPTAIN (*rising*): I hope I have made myself quite clear—

HERR S.: But, Captain—

CAPTAIN: You will please arrange things as I have suggested—to-night I wish no allowances to be made.

He bows as he is about to go out, meets SARI coming in. She has grown more poised and mature during the years spent with CARL. She starts visibly on seeing CAPTAIN AUGUST—he clicks his heels and bows.

Good morning.

SARI: Good morning.

CAPTAIN: It is a beautiful morning.

SARI: Beautiful.

CAPTAIN: But chilly.

SARI: It is very warm out.

CAPTAIN: Would you honour me by lunching with me?

SARI: I'm so sorry, but I am already engaged.

CAPTAIN: Perhaps a drive a little later on; we might go up to Cobenzil—

SARI: Please forgive me, but to-day it is impossible.

CAPTAIN: I quite understand. (*He bows again.*) Until to-night, madame.

He goes off.

HERR S. (*furiously*): It may interest you to know that you are losing me one of my most valued clients—I'll deal with you later. Captain—a moment, please—Captain—

He rushes off. SARI looks after him pensively for a moment and then sighs. MANON comes down from the dais.

MANON: Sari.

SARI: Oh!

MANON: Don't look so startled—

SARI: I came to find Carl. Have you seen him?

MANON: Yes, I've just been rehearsing with him.

SARI: Oh!

MANON: He's about somewhere.

SARI: I'll find him. (*She turns to go.*)

MANON: I want to speak to you.

SARI (*coldly*): Yes? What is it?

MANON: Oh, why do you always look at me like that?

SARI: Like what?

MANON: Aloof and superior.

SARI: I wasn't conscious of being either of those things.

MANON: Yes, you were—you know you were—you always are with me, But, listen, never mind about that now—I heard Schlick arranging for you to have supper in a private room with Captain August to-night.

SARI: What!

MANON: So be careful.

SARI (*incredulously*): You heard Schlick arranging for
me—

MANON: Yes—yes, yes—I thought you might like to know.

SARI: How horrible!

MANON: Not so horrible as all that; lots of the girls here would be glad of the chance, but as Carl is in love with you and you are apparently in love with him, I thought—

SARI (*rather stiffly*): Thank you, Manon.

MANON: Not at all. (*She turns to go.*)

SARI: Manon—

MANON (*stopping*): Yes?

SARI: I'm sorry.

MANON: What for?

SARI: If my manner is—well, unkind—

MANON (*patting her arm*): All is well, my dear—I don't love him any more, really, at least I don't think I do, and anyhow you have no reason to be jealous, nothing to be afraid of. Look at me, and then look in the glass. (*She kisses her lightly, and goes off humming a reprise of her former song.*)

CARL enters from left.

SARI: Carl.

CARL: Darling! (*He kisses her fondly.*) How quick you've been dressing. I crept out without waking you.

SARI: Yes, I know; you must never do that again.

CARL: Why—what's the matter?

SARI: I dreamt—something dreadful. I awoke terrified—I came straight here without any coffee or anything—to see if you were safe.

CARL: I safe? Why, of course I'm safe—why shouldn't I be?

SARI: I don't know, I'm frightened. I hate this place—let's go away. I'd rather go back to singing in the streets again, at least we were independent then and together.

CARL: We're together now—always.

SARI (*wildly*): No, no—not here we're not—we're separated by hundreds of things and people—you're the chef d'orchestre and I'm a professional dance partner. I hate it, I tell you—I can't be gay and enjoy it like the other girls, because I love you—I can't feel happy when the cavalry officers put their arms round my waist and dance and flirt with me, because I love you, and because I'm scared.

CARL: Why are you scared?

SARI: Something horrible will happen if we stay here. I know it, I feel it——

CARL: Come along and have a little lunch, then you'll feel better. We're going to Gussi's flat—she's got a present for you—you know that red coat——

SARI: Oh, Carl, Carl, you won't understand!——

CARL takes her in his arms.

“EVERMORE AND A DAY”

I

CARL: Why are you weeping, dear?
What shadows haunted you in sleeping, dear?
Tho' portents and fears
Your Courage may be plundering
Your Faith in my Love
Should leave no time for wondering.
Even your Dreams are in my keeping, dear.

SARI: Ah! No! My sweet
Fate knows our Happiness is too complete
Tho' now in our Love's security
We live awhile,
A little of Hearts' content
The Gods may give awhile,
Time's on the wing, my love,
And Time is fleet,

CARL: Peace enfold you,
Here in my arms I will hold you,
Fears receding
Further and further away.

SARI: *Refrain*
Tho' the world may divide us
And ill fortune betide us
Yet our Love is a token
That cannot be broken
Or stolen away.
There's a Passionate glory
In the heart of our story,

We have something to guide us
Evermore and a day.

CARL: Peace enfold you,
Here in my arms I will hold you,
Fears receding
Further and further away,
Why are you weeping, dear,
You know your heart is in my keeping, dear.

CARL: You must take hold of your courage, my sweet—we must both put up with things now in order to be secure later on—no more street singing—it broke my heart to see you hungry—that's all past—you've been so splendid and brave all through—just hold on for a few weeks more until we have enough to start that little café——

SARI (*hysterically*): Laugh at me then—laugh everything away, stop me being solemn—we're both too young to be dreary and sentimental—make me forget the present in planning for the future—where will our café be? How shall we manage it? Shall I be able to sing your songs there?—one day I might make them famous—I love your music so very much—I want it to be known all over the world, and one day it will be, I'm sure of it—do you think I could help—do you?

CARL (*kissing her*): Darling.

“LITTLE CAFE”

CARL: We share a mutual ambition
Which naught can disarrange,
SARI: Based on the hopeful supposition
That soon our luck will change.

CARL: Tho' we very often wonder whether
 Poverty will win the day,

SARI: Just as long as we remain together
 Troubles seem to fade away.

BOTH: However hard the bed one lies on
 The same old dreams begin,
We're always scanning the horizon
 For when our ship comes in.

Refrain

CARL: We'll have a sweet little café
 In a neat little square,

SARI: We'll find our fortune
 And our happiness there.

CARL: We shall thrive on the vain and resplendent

SARI: And contrive to remain independent.

CARL: We'll have a meek reputation
 And a chic clientele.

SARI: Kings will fall under our spell.

BOTH: We'll be so zealous
 That the world will be jealous
 Of our sweet little café in our square.

SARI: Can you imagine our sensations
 When we've security?

CARL: And all our dreary deprivations
 Are just a memory.

SARI: Tho' we're very often driven frantic,
 Peace is very hard to find.

CARL: All these dreadful days will seem romantic
 When we've left them far behind.

BOTH: Fate needn't be quite such a dragon,
 He knows how tired we are.
We'll hitch our hopeful little wagon
 On to a lucky star.

Refrain

CARL: We'll have a sweet little café
 In a neat little square,

SARI: We'll find our fortune
 And our happiness there.

CARL: We shall thrive on the vain and resplendent

SARI: And contrive to remain independent.

CARL: We'll have a meek reputation
 And a chic clientele.

SARI: Kings will fall under our spell.

BOTH: We'll be so zealous
 That the world will be jealous
 Of our sweet little café in our square.

At the end of the last refrain CARL takes SARI in his arms and the curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE II

CHARACTERS

SARI LINDEN

CARL LINDEN

MANON (LA CREVETTE)

CAPTAIN AUGUST LUTTE

LIEUTENANT TRANISCH

HERR SCHLICK

LOTTE

FREDA

HANSI

GUSSI

SIX SPECIAL DANCERS

OFFICERS, GUESTS, WAITERS,

MUSICIANS, ETC.

The scene is the same as ACT II, SCENE I.

ACT II

SCENE II

The scene is the same, except that the atmosphere has changed from a frowsy daylight squalor to a tinselled gas-light gaiety.

It is about 2 a. m.

When the curtain rises everyone is waltzing. CARL is conducting the orchestra on the dais. Some of the GIRLS have MALE PARTNERS and some are dancing with one another. The stage should look as hot and crowded as possible. At the end of the opening waltz CARL stops his orchestra and the theatre orchestra takes up the OFFICERS' entrance music. About a dozen smart OFFICERS come marching on in attractive undress uniform. They sing a concerted introductory number with the GIRLS.

“OFFICERS’ CHORUS”

- OFFICERS: We wish to order wine, please,
Expressly from the Rhine, please,
The year we really don’t much care.
- LADIES: Oh dear,
Now that you’re here
Think of the wear and tear.

BITTER SWEET

OFFICERS: We hope without insistence
To overcome resistance
In all you little ladies fair.

LADIES: Oh well,
How can we tell
Whether you'd really dare?

OFFICERS: We sincerely hope it's really not a thank-
less task
Amusing us,
Won't you please agree?

LADIES: Ah, me!

OFFICERS: You could quickly break our hearts by
everything we ask
Refusing us;
Cruel that would be
Ladies, can't you see!
We're officers and gentlemen,
Reliable and true,
Considerate and chivalrous
In everything we do.
Though we're gay and drunk a trifle.
All our laughter we should stifle,
Were we summoned by a bugle call.
We're amorous and passionate,
But dignified and stern,
Which if you play us false you'll quickly
learn.
Do not let our presence grieve you,
When we've loved you we shall leave
you,
For we're officers and gentlemen, that's all!

After song, CAPTAIN AUGUST and TRANISCH enter, and CAPTAIN AUGUST and the OFFICERS sing "TOKAY," of which everyone joins in the last Refrain.

"TOKAY"

OFFICERS: Tokay!

CAPTAIN A.: When we're thoroughly wined and dined,
And the barracks are left behind,
We come down to the town to find
Some relief from the daily grind.
Love is kind,
Love is blind.

OFFICERS: Tokay!

CAPTAIN A.: When the thoughts of a man incline
To the grapes of a sunlit vine,
On the banks of the golden Rhine,
Slowly ripening pure and fine,
Sweet divine,
Lover's wine.
Lift your voices till the rafters ring,
Fill your glasses to the brim and sing:

Refrain

Tokay!
The golden sunshine of a summer day,
Tokay!
Will bear the burden of your cares away.
Here's to the love in you,
The hate in you,
Desire in you.

OFFICERS: Wine of the sun that will waft you along,
Lifting you high on the wings of a song.

CAPTAIN A.: Dreams in you,
The flame in you,
The fire in you,
Tokay—Tokay.

OFFICERS: So while forgetfulness we borrow,
Never minding what to-morrow has to
say,

CAPTAIN A.: Tokay!

ALL: The only call we all obey,
Tokay—Tokay—Tokay!

Some go off to the bar, others seat themselves at tables and order wine. SARI and MANON come in and sit at a table below the balcony to the right. SARI is simply dressed in white. MANON is very gay in scarlet sequins.

SARI: I'm so tired.

MANON: Well, for heaven's sake don't look as if you were.

SARI: I'm sick of pretending.

MANON: So am I, but it's no use worrying about that. The whole business is pretending. Life's pretending.

SARI: That hateful Captain August—he smiled at me in the bar—an odious smile.

MANON: I hope you smiled back.

SARI: I certainly did not.

MANON: Well, that was very foolish of you—there's nothing so alluring to that type of man as snowy chastity.

SARI: How can you, Manon. (*She smiles.*) I'm so miserable really, it's horrid of you to laugh at me.

MANON: That's better—you're smiling yourself, now.

LIEUTENANT TRANISCH *enters from the bar, comes to their table and bows to MANON.*

TRANISCH: Mademoiselle la Crevette.

MANON: Yes?

TRANISCH: We have never spoken before, but I wish to say you are an admirable artiste—you sing like an angel.

MANON (*laughing very loudly*): You Viennese are so gallant. I sing like a frog.

TRANISCH: Will you come to the bar and take a drink with me?

MANON: What is this now—what does this mean? Is it the birth of a romance? I feel so flattered.

TRANISCH (*slightly embarrassed*): Mademoiselle—I—

MANON: Never mind, Lieutenant, I am not deceived—you think I sing well, that is very kind—now tell me—cards on the table—to which of the more attractive women here do you want me to introduce you?

TRANISCH: Really—you misunderstand me—I—

MANON: Come now—tell me—I have no sensibilities.

TRANISCH: There is a small blonde lady like a kitten in yellow—I will admit to you frankly—she enthrals me strangely.

MANON: That would be Gussi. (*She rises.*) Excuse me for a moment, Sari.

SARI: Of course.

TRANISCH (*clicking his heels and bowing to SARI*): Fraulein.

MANON: Come along—but let me warn you—Gussi is a collector.

TRANISCH: Collector?

MANON: Yes, of antiques—very enthusiastic—old jewellery for preference. If your acquaintance ripens, let me advise you when walking to keep to the more modern thoroughfares. (*She looks at SARI smilingly.*) Heigho—if love were all!

She and TRANISCH go off to the bar. CAPTAIN AUGUST enters and comes to SARI's table, but as he does so CARL sees him and comes down from the orchestra.

CAPTAIN A. (bowing): Madame——

CARL: Sari, I want to talk to you. You remember the second movement in the concerto I was scoring yesterday, I have had the most magnificent idea—instead of using strings alone, I shall strengthen it with the zimbale just towards the end where it goes—tum tum tum tum——
(*He hums.*)

SARI: Yes, I know—what a good idea. (*She also hums*)
Tum tum—tum tum tum——

They both hum together, and finally CAPTAIN AUGUST, finding himself completely ignored, turns on his heel and marches back into the bar.

(*Half laughing*) Oh, Carl—that was wonderful of you.

CARL: I was watching—I'm always watching to see that no harm comes to you.

SARI: I hate him so—he won't leave me alone—he embarrasses me.

CARL: Cheer up, my dearest.

SARI: I'll try. (*She smiles.*) Oh, Carl, there's something so heavy weighing down on my heart—I felt it this morning, and it's there again now.

CARL (*looking at her*): You're very strange to-night—you've been strange all day—eager and tense like a

frightened child. Is there anything the matter really?

SARI: Yes—no—I don't know. I feel as though fate were too strong for us, as though our love for one another and our happiness together was making the gods angry. I feel suddenly insecure.

CARL: We'll go away, then, to-morrow.

SARI: Carl!

CARL: We have a little money saved anyhow. I hate Schlick and this place as much as you do really. To-night is the end of it. We'll go to Frankfort. Heinrich is there, he'll help us.

SARI: To-night is the end of it.

CARL: You remember Heinrich—with the long brown beard—you laughed at him.

SARI: Yes, he was funny, but I liked him.

CARL: Do you feel happier now?

SARI: Oh yes, much, much happier.

CARL: So do I—we'll be free again—Independent—I must get back. Au revoir, my dear love.

SARI: Au revoir.

She kisses her hand to him and goes off. GUSSI and LIEUTENANT TRANISCH come on, followed by HANSI and FREDA, who are giggling.

GUSSI: Louis Quinze—of course it was only paste, but definitely Louis Quinze.

TRANISCH: How interesting.

GUSSI: I'll show it to you to-morrow—we can drive there after luncheon.

TRANISCH: We haven't had supper yet.

GUSSI: No, but we will—we'll sit here—I shall have to dance in a minute—Fritz—Hans——

She sits down with TRANISCH at a small table and calls the waiters. FREDA and HANSI sit down also, but on the opposite side of the stage, at the same table at which CARL and SARI played the preceding scene.

HANSI: I'll tell you one thing here and now, whatever Gussi is talking about is *not* paste.

FREDA: I doubt if it's even Louis Quinze.

SARI comes in.

HANSI: Here comes the snow queen.

FREDA: Hullo, Sari.

SARI: Hullo.

HANSI: Any offers to-night?

FREDA: Don't tease her, Hansi—she's in love.

SARI (smiling): No, no offers so far.

HANSI: Do you want a drink?

SARI: Yes—I'd love one.

HANSI: Fritz——

She calls the waiter and orders wine.

FREDA: That's pretty, that dress—is it new?

SARI: Yes. I made it myself from a pattern.

FREDA: It sags a little bit behind—here—look—give me a pin, Hansi.

HANSI: You can have this brooch for the time being, but give it back, it's not valuable, but lucky.

She gives SARI a brooch. SARI stands up while

FREDA fixes the brooch on to the dress. CAPTAIN AUGUST comes in and bows ironically to SARI.

CAPTAIN A.: Will you honour me with this dance, please?

SARI (jumping slightly): Oh—no, I'm sorry—I'm engaged.

CAPTAIN A.: I fear that is not strictly true.

FREDA: I'll dance with you, if you like.

CAPTAIN A.: Please do not think me impolite, but I have set my heart on dancing with Fraulein Sari.

SARI: Forgive me, Captain, but it's quite impossible.

CAPTAIN A.: We shall see. (*He bows abruptly and walks across the stage to where SCHLICK is standing talking to two other officers. He is obviously very angry. He speaks to SCHLICK swiftly and angrily.*

SARI: I hate him—he's always tormenting me.

FREDA: You're unwise, my dear—it's best to humour them a little.

SARI: I've tried—I've danced with him, but he presses me too close and whispers horrible things to me.

HANSI: He's very rich and, I believe, generous.

SARI: Yes, but that doesn't interest me.

HANSI (*wistfully*): There's no doubt about it—love is very bad for business.

SCHLICK comes to their table.

SCHLICK: Sari—

SARI: Yes, Herr Schlick.

SCHLICK: You are engaged and paid by me as a dancing partner for my clients, are you not?

SARI: Yes.

SCHLICK: I have received several complaints from Captain August Lutte—he says you persistently refuse to dance with him.

SARI: He takes advantage of my position.

SCHLICK: It would be better if you realised once and for all that you have no position—after to-night you may consider your engagement at an end.

SARI (*with spirit*): It is an end anyhow—my husband and I are leaving Vienna to-morrow.

SCHLICK: Oho—I see. Well, I should like to remind you that you both have a week's salary owing to you, and unless you dance willingly and agreeably with Captain August or any other of the officers when they ask you to, neither you nor your husband will receive a penny of your salary—I run my café on business lines, you understand.

SARI: But, Herr Schlick, that is unfair—my behaviour has nothing to do with my husband.

SCHLICK: That is enough. I am sick to death of your stupid mincing airs and graces—unless you behave yourself to-night, you will both leave to-morrow without your money, and be damned to you!

He leaves SARI, who sinks miserably into her chair.

HANSI and FREDA try to comfort her and give her some wine. SCHLICK advances to the middle of the floor to announce the commencement of the entertainment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I crave your kind attention for the most superb musical entertainment ever offered in Vienna.

Everyone applauds.

Thank you. Thank you. My first number will be my six magnificent dancing girls—trained exclusively in the finest ballet schools in the world. Lise, Trude, Fritz, Toni, Greta and Elsa.

SIX GIRLS rise from their various tables and make a line in the middle of the floor. There is a lot of applause. CARL strikes up their music and they dance, after which they return to their tables amid cheers. SCHLICK again takes the floor.

Gentlemen—Ladies and Gentlemen—I beg attention for my favourite, your favourite, the world's favourite star—Manon la Crevette.

He steps aside and MANON comes running on. She is greeted with vociferous applause. She sings a very saucy French song: "Bonne Nuit, Merci!" interspersed with a good deal of back-chat and ogling.

"BONNE NUIT, MERCI!"

MANON: Lorsque j'étais petite fille
 En marchant parmi les prés
 J'entendit la voix d'ma tante
 Qui murmura à côté,
 'N'oublie pas la politesse
 Lorsque viendra un amant,
 Car tout le bonheur réside là dedans.'

Refrain

C'est pourquoi dans mes affaires,
 Soit de cœur ou soit d'esprit,
 C'est pourquoi je tâche de plaire
 Toute la foule de mes amis,
 Soit qu'ils m'offrent pied-à-terre
 Ou me montrent une bonne affaire
 J'leur réponds, 'Vas-y. Bonne Nuit.
 Merci!'

Lorsque je suis v'nue à Paris
 J'étais sage de nature,
 Mais que faire dans la vie
 Etant jeune pour rester pure!

BITTER SWEET

Quand ma politesse m'obligea
 Lorsqu' je suivais par hasard
 Une aventure dans les boîtes des boulevards.

Refrain

Et j'ai rencontré en ville
 Un monsieur bien comme il faut,
 Il m'a dit, 'ma petite fille,
 Veux-tu faire un p'tit do-do?'
 Lorsqu' j'arrive chez lui tout de suite
 I'me dit 'Deshabilles-toi vite!'
 J'me suis dis 'Vas'y. Bonne Nuit.
 Merci!'

As encore she sings a waltz song in which everybody joins.

“WALTZ SONG”

'Tis time that we were parted,
 You and I,
 However broken-hearted,
 'Tis good-bye!
 Although our love has ended
 And darkness has descended,
 I call to you with one last cry:

Refrain

Kiss me
 Before you go away!
 Miss me
 Through every night and day.

Through clouds are grey above you,
 You'll hear me say I love you!
 Kiss me
 Before you go away!

Parmi les chansons tristes
 De l'amour,
 Joies et chagrins existent
 Tour à tour,
 Et presqu'avec contrainte
 On risque la douce étreinte
 Qui nous sépare enfin toujours.

Refrain

Je t'aime,
 Tes baisers m'ont grisée
 Même
 A l'heure de t'en aller,
 La volupté troublante
 Brise mes lèvres brûlantes,
 Je t'aime,
 A l'heure de t'en aller.

At the end of this CARL strikes up another waltz and everybody begins to dance. SCHLICK comes over to SARI's table and stands behind it. After a moment CAPTAIN AUGUST approaches and bows.

CAPTAIN A.: Fraulein Sari has perhaps by now forgotten her other engagement.

SARI (*rising agitatedly*): I—please—I—

SCHLICK: You are quite right, Captain, she has forgotten.

SARI: Captain August—I am very tired—will you please forgive me just this once?

CAPTAIN A.: One dance, please.

SCHLICK: I think you would be well advised to grant Captain August's request.

SARI (*pulling herself together*): Certainly, Captain, I shall be charmed.

She gives one despairing look at CARL on the dais—he is watching anxiously—then she surrenders herself to the CAPTAIN'S arms and they begin to waltz. CARL watches all the time. As the dance progresses CAPTAIN AUGUST is obviously becoming more and more aggressively amorous. CARL, with obvious agitation, perceptibly quickens the tempo of the music. Finally the CAPTAIN waltzes SARI into the centre of the floor—stops dead, tightens his arms round her and kisses her on the mouth passionately, bending her right back as he does so. She gives one cry, CARL stops the music dead with a crash and leaps over the railing of the dais on to the middle of the floor. He drags SARI away from CAPTAIN AUGUST, then, springing at him, strikes him in the face. Immediately the buzz of excitement dies down into dead silence.

CARL (*wildly*): Swine—filthy, ill-mannered drunken swine!

SARI (*in a whisper*): Carl!

MANON (*rushing forward*): Carl—don't be a fool.

CAPTAIN AUGUST gives an unpleasant laugh and draws his sword.

CAPTAIN A.: Tranisch—look after our foolhardy young friend here, will you?

TRANISCH: Not now—not now—wait.

CAPTAIN A.: I regret—I cannot wait.

TRANISCH *draws his sword and hands it to CARL—MANON clutches his arm.*

CARL: Stand back, Manon—look after Sari—please.

The CAPTAIN attacks him and they fight a brief duel, the crowd making a large ring round them. Suddenly CAPTAIN AUGUST knocks CARL's sword from his hand and runs him through. There is a general scream and everyone crowds forward. SARI silently and madly fights through the crowd and sinks to the ground, taking CARL in her arms. TRANISCH motions the crowd back. There is silence except for MANON, who is crying loudly and hopelessly.

SARI (*softly—she is dry-eyed*): I'll love you always—always—do you hear?

CARL (*weakly*): Sari—Sari—my sweet, sweet Sari—

His head falls back in her lap, and she kneels there staring before her dazed and hopeless as the curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

CHARACTERS

MADAME SARI LINDEN
THE MARQUIS OF SHAYNE
LADY JAMES (HARRIET)
MRS. PROUTIE (GLORIA)
MRS. BETHEL (EFFIE)
LADY SORREL (HONOR)
MRS. VALE (JANE)
THE DUCHESS OF TENTERDEN (VICTORIA)
LORD JAMES
MR. PROUTIE
MR. BETHEL
LORD SORREL
MR. VALE
THE DUKE OF TENTERDEN
THE HON. HUGH DEVON
MRS. DEVON
VERNON CRAFT
CEDRIC BALLANTYNE
BERTRAM SELICK
LORD HENRY JADE
ACCOMPANIST (to MADAME LINDEN)
BUTLER
GUESTS, ETC.

The scene is LORD SHAYNE's house in London.

The Year is 1895.

ACT III

SCENE I

It is the drawing room of the MARQUIS OF SHAYNE's house in London. Fifteen years have passed since Act II, and it is now 1895. When the curtain rises, LORD SHAYNE, a distinguished old man, is standing a little to the right receiving his guests, who are announced by the BUTLER. LADY JAMES (HARRIET) and MRS. PROUTIE (GLORIA) are announced with their husbands, likewise MRS. BETHEL (EFFIE), LADY SORREL (HONOR), MRS. VALE (JANE), and lastly the DUCHESS OF TENTERDEN (VICTORIA). They are all by now smart middle-aged society matrons. Their entrance and LORD SHAYNE's reception of them is all part of the opening chorus.

OPENING CHORUS

ALL: Tarara boom-de-ay,
Tarara boom-de-ay,
We are the most effectual,
Intellectual
Movement of the day.
Our moral standards sway
Like Mrs. Tanqueray,
And we are theoretically
Most æsthetically
Eager to display

BITTER SWEET

The fact that we're aggressively
And excessively
Anxious to destroy
All the snobbery
And hob-nobbery
Of the hoi-polloi.
Tarara boom-de-ay.
It's mental washing day,
And come what may
We'll scrub until the nation's morals
shrink away.
Tarara boom de-ay!

EXQUISITES: Though we are languid in appearance,
We're in the vanguard.
We feel we can guard
The cause of Art.
We shall ignore all interference,
For our complacence
With this renaissance
Is frightfully smart.
Please do not think us unrelenting,
Our charming frolic
With the symbolic
Is meek and mild.
We merely spend our time preventing
Some earnest stripling
From liking Kipling
Instead of Wilde.
Now that we find the dreary nineteenth
century is closing,
We mean to start the twentieth in ecstasies
of posing.

ALL: Tarara boom-de-ay,
It's mental washing day,
And come what may
We'll scrub until the tiresome bourgeois
shrink away.
Tarara boom-de-ay!

Which is concluded by a SEXTETTE by HARRIET, GLORIA, HONOR, JANE, EFFIE and VICTORIA. Everyone else retires into the supper room, leaving them on the stage.

“ALAS, THE TIME IS PAST”

Alas, the time is past when we
Could frolic with impunity.
Secure in our virginity,
We sometimes look aghast
Adown the lanes of memory,
Alas, the time is past.
Ah, then the world was at our feet,
When we were sweet-and-twenty,
We never guessed that what we'd got,
Tho' not a lot—was plenty.
We gaily sought some Abelard
To cherish, guard and own us,
But all we know of storm and strife
Our married life—has shown us.
Alas, the time is past when we
Could frolic with impunity,
Secure in our virginity,

We sometimes look aghast
Adown the lanes of memory.
Alas, the time is past.
Alack-a-day me—alack-a-day me!
Ah, then the world was at our feet,
Alas, the time is past.

HARRIET: What have you done to your hair, Effie—it strikes me as peculiar.

EFFIE: Nothing in particular.

GLORIA: I'm afraid you're becoming a little pernickety, Harriet; you must guard against it.

HONOR: Where's your late husband, Victoria?

VICTORIA: Later than ever, my dear—he's at Boodles, I expect.

JANE: Talking too much.

HARRIET: And drinking much too much.

VICTORIA: You can't upset me by saying that, Harriet dear. I find alcohol one of the greatest comforts of matrimony!

HONOR: Victoria!

VICTORIA: In a husband, I mean—it leaves one free for one's charities.

JANE: A little too free sometimes, my pet.

HARRIET: Who is this woman?

EFFIE: Which woman?

HARRIET: The one we've been invited to meet.

VICTORIA: Some strange Hungarian singer—probably very glittering and rather stout.

HONOR: Oh, I shouldn't think so—Lord Shayne has been pursuing her for ages from capital to capital.

HARRIET: Central Europe is far too musical, there can be no two opinions about that.

JANE: I hear she's very beautiful.

LORD SHAYNE *has entered unobserved from the supper room.*

LORD S.: She is——

VICTORIA: Good heavens, how you made me jump!

LORD S.: She is one of the few really beautiful people in the world.

HARRIET: How very disconcerting!

HONOR: Do you think we shall like that?

LORD S.: I shall be very interested to see the effect she has on you—you are all—if I may say so—so very representative.

VICTORIA: Of what, dear Lord Shayne?

LORD S.: Shall we say “fin de siècle”?

HARRIET: I was afraid somebody would say that before the evening was over.

The BUTLER announces the HON. HUGH DEVON and MRS. DEVON. LORD SHAYNE moves over to greet them. HUGH has developed along the exact lines that one would have expected; he has become a good deal more pompous with the years, and has a tremendously diplomatic manner. His wife is fat and vague.

VICTORIA: Margaret dear, how are you?

MRS. D.: Shattered, completely shattered! Our cabby was raving mad. He kept saying the oddest things to his horse, at least I hope they were to his horse. I pretended not to understand, one has to think of prestige——

LORD S.: I hear you're going to Vienna.

HUGH: Yes, next week, thank God! I believe Mullins has been making a fearful hash of everything.

MRS. D.: Isn't it exciting! I was so afraid we were going to be sent to Riga or Christiania or somewhere draughty like that.

HARRIET: Hugh generally gets what he wants.

MRS. D.: As it is, I don't know what I shall do with the children. I can't help feeling that Eva is the wrong age for Vienna.

LORD S.: No one is the wrong age for Vienna—it's a city of enchantment—magnificent.

HUGH: I'm told the plumbing is appalling.

VICTORIA: Lord Shayne has fallen in love again—haven't you, my dear?

LORD S.: I am always in love with beauty.

HUGH: Admirably put, Shayne. I quite agree with you.

JANE: We're all on tenterhooks to see Madame Linden —she's due at any moment.

MRS. D.: What are tenterhooks, I never know.

The BUTLER throws open the doors and announces

MADAME SARI LINDEN. SARAH enters, exquisitely gowned and radiantly beautiful, carrying herself with tremendous poise; her jewels are superb, and the years have invested her with a certain air of decision which is almost metallic as compared with the tremulous diffidence of her youth. LORD SHAYNE goes forward and kisses her hand.

LORD S.: My dear, how enchanting to see you again.
(He turns with a smile) I think you know everyone here.

HARRIET: Good heavens, Sarah!

VICTORIA *(astounded)*: Sarah!

EFFIE: It can't be—it can't be—

She rushes up and kisses her. There is a babel of surprised and excited conversation. HUGH stands a little apart, looking a trifle embarrassed.

HONOR: We heard that you had died, ages and ages ago.

SARI: I did die. Fifteen years ago to be exact. Things happened and I couldn't come back. I didn't want to come back, so I thought I'd better die, vaguely and obscurely. It was the only thing to do—it sort of rounded everything off so satisfactorily.

JANE: It's unbelievable, Sarah, dear Sarah.

SARI: Please don't be quite so pleased to see me. It makes me feel ashamed, particularly with Hugh standing there, looking so stern. How do you do, Hugh?

HUGH: I'm delighted to see you again. Margaret, I want you to meet Sarah—Sarah——? (*He looks questioningly at her.*)

SARI: Linden—don't say you've forgotten Carl Linden, the man I eloped with, practically under your nose, Hugh?

HUGH: I remember perfectly—how is he?

SARI: He's dead—I'm so glad to meet you, Mrs. Devon. I do hope Hugh is a charming husband and not too embittered—I treated him abominably, you know.

MRS. D. (*shaking hands with her*): It's all so very surprising—very, very surprising—Hugh told me the whole story, when he heard of your death in Prague or somewhere. He was dreadfully upset, weren't you, Hugh?

HUGH: Yes, indeed, I was.

SARI (*smiling and tapping him lightly with her fan*):

Dear Hugh, never mind—everything always turns out for the best, doesn't it? At least, almost everything.

LORD S.: Won't you have a little supper—Sari?

HONOR: "Sari"—it does sound pretty, doesn't it—"Sari."

SARI: Only a very little, if you want me to sing for you.

They all go into the supper room, chattering and laughing, while the ORCHESTRA very softly and lightly plays a reprise of the "Blindman's Buff Finale" in Act I. When the supper room doors close behind them, the other doors open and four over-exquisitely dressed young men enter. They all wear in their immaculate buttonholes green carnations. VERNON CRAFT, a poet, CEDRIC BALLANTYNE, a painter, LORD HENRY JADE, a dilettante, and BERTRAM SELLICK, a playwright.

BERTIE: It's entirely Vernon's fault that we are so entrancingly late.

VERNON: My silk socks were two poems this evening and they refused to scan.

HENRY: It's going to be inexpressibly dreary, I can feel it in my bones.

CEDRIC: Don't be absurd, Henry, your whole charm lies in the fact that you have no bones.

They sing a quartette: "We all Wore a Green Carnation."

"WE ALL WORE A GREEN CARNATION"

Blasé boys are we,
Exquisitely free

From the dreary and quite absurd
Moral views of the common herd.

We like porphyry bowls,
Chandeliers and stoles,
We're most spirited,
Carefully filleted "souls."

Refrain

Pretty boys, witty boys, too, too, too
Lazy to fight stagnation,
Haughty boys, naughty boys, all we do
Is to pursue sensation.
The portals of society
Are always opened wide,
The world our eccentricity condones,
A note of quaint variety
We're certain to provide.
We dress in very decorative tones.
Faded boys, jaded boys, womankind's
Gift to a bulldog nation,
In order to distinguish us from less enlightened minds,
We all wear a green carnation.

We believe in Art,
Though we're poles apart
From the fools who are thrilled by Greuze.
We like Beardsley and Green Chartreuse.
Women say we're too
Bored to bill and coo,
We smile wearily,
It's so drearily true!

Refrain

Pretty boys, witty boys, you may sneer
At our disintegration,
Haughty boys, naughty boys, dear, dear, dear!
Swooning with affection.
Our figures sleek and willowy,
Our lips incarnadine,
May worry the majority a bit,
But matrons rich and billowy,
Invite us out to dine,
And revel in our phosphorescent wit.
Faded boys, jaded boys, come what may,
Art is our inspiration,
And as we are the reason for the 'Nineties' being gay,
We all wear a green carnation.

Refrain

Pretty boys, witty boys, yearning for
Permanent adulation,
Haughty boys, naughty boys, every pore
Bursting with self-inflation,
We feel we're rather Grecian,
As our manners indicate,
Our sense of moral values isn't strong.
For ultimate completion
We shall really have to wait
Until the Day of Judgment comes along.
Faded boys, jaded boys, each one craves
Some sort of soul salvation,
But when we rise reluctantly but gracefully from our
graves,
We'll all wear a green carnation.

They go off. LORD SHAYNE and SARI come in from the supper room.

LORD S.: I want to talk to you.

SARI: I know.

LORD S.: You can guess what I am going to say?

SARI: Yes, I think so.

LORD S.: I love you.

SARI (*smiling*): I was right.

LORD S.: Will you honour me by becoming my wife? You've now refused me in practically every capital in Europe—London is the last on the list.

SARI: Why should London prove the exception?

LORD S.: It's home.

SARI (*sighing*): Yes—I suppose it is.

LORD S.: It has charm, London—a very peaceful charm, particularly for anyone who is tired like you. You can drive in the Park in the Spring and look at the crocuses.

SARI: Please don't talk of Spring.

LORD S.: Then there's the Autumn, when the leaves fall in the Square, and you can sit on a rickety iron chair and watch the children searching for horse chestnuts.

SARI (*wistfully*): Whose children?

LORD S.: Just anybody's.

SARI: The fogs come in November.

LORD S.: Fogs can be delightful.

SARI: Can they? (*She smiles.*)

LORD S.: Particularly when you're warm and snug by a crackly fire drinking tea, while from the yellow gloom outside the trees look in at you like ghosts.

SARI: I don't like tea or ghosts.

LORD S.: You're very hard to please.

SARI: How do you know I'm tired?

LORD S.: By your voice, and your eyes.

SARI: I'm afraid I don't love you—actually! I think you're kind and understanding and gay and very dear, but you know I've only really loved one man all my life. I know it's tiresome to be so faithful, particularly to a mere memory, but there it is.

LORD S.: I think perhaps I could make you happy—anyhow happier.

SARI: May I think it over a little? I'll let you know a little later—

The supper room doors open and everyone comes noisily into the room.

VICTORIA: Sarah—aren't you going to sing soon?

HONOR: Do you remember our singing lessons at Madame Claire's before you met Carl Linden—I mean—Oh, dear—

SARI (*smiling*): I remember! I do hope my voice has improved since then.

LORD S.: Silence, please! Madame Sari Linden will sing us some of Carl Linden's enchanting songs, the songs she has made so famous.

Everyone applauds and arranges themselves comfortably.

SARI: Where is my accompanist, is he here?

A foreign-looking YOUNG MAN detaches himself from the crowd.

YOUNG MAN: Here I am.

SARI: What shall we start with?

YOUNG MAN: "The River Song"?

SARI: No, that's too difficult to begin with.

YOUNG MAN: "Zigeuner?"

SARI: That will do. Ladies and Gentlemen, this song needs a slight preface. My husband wrote it when he was only sixteen. He visited Germany for the first time and sailed down the Rhine past forests and castles and gipsy encampments, and they fired his imagination so much that he wrote this song of a lovely flaxen-haired German Princess who fell in love with a Zigeuner-gipsy.

The YOUNG MAN starts the introduction and SARI takes her stand by the piano. LORD SHAYNE stands pensively near her, gazing at her. She sings "Zigeuner."

"ZIGEUNER"

Once upon a time
Many years ago,
Lived a fair Princess,
Hating to confess
Loneliness was torturing her so.
Then a gipsy came.
Called to her by name.
Woo'd her with a song,
Sensuous and strong,
All the summer long;
Her passion seemed to tremble like a living flame.

Is taken up after the first verse by the ORCHESTRA.

Bid my weeping cease,
Melody that brings
Merciful release,
Promises of peace;
Through the gentle throbbing of the strings.

Music of the plain,
Music of the wild,
Come to me again,
Hear me not in vain,
Soothe a heart in pain,
And let me to my happiness be reconciled.

Refrain

Play to me beneath the summer noon,
Zigeuner!—Zigeuner!—Zigeuner!
All I ask of life is just to listen
To the songs that you sing,
My spirit like a bird on the wing
Your melodies adoring—soaring,
Call to me with some barbaric tune,
Zigeuner!—Zigeuner!—Zigeuner!
Now you hold me in your power,
Play to me for just an hour,
Zigeuner!

At the end of it everyone applauds. She silences them by raising her hand.

This is a very simple, sentimental little song. I do hope you won't laugh at it—it means a very great deal to me.

She unpins a bunch of white violets from her waist and throws them to LORD SHAYNE. Then she begins to sing the refrain of "I'll See You Again."

Reprise

I'll see you again,
I live each moment through again.

Time has lain heavy between,
But what has been
Can leave me never;
Your dear memory
Throughout my life has guided me.
Though my world has gone awry,
Though the years my tears may dry,
I shall love you till I die,
Good-bye!

At the end the lights dim and the ORCHESTRA crashes out the melody. When the lights go up again, it is the present day, the same as Act I, Scene I, and she is an old woman singing to a lot of young people sprawling on the floor. When she finishes singing, DOLLY CHAMBERLAIN springs to her feet.

DOLLY: It is the most thrilling, divine, marvellous thing I've ever heard—Vincent, I'm mad about you—d'you hear—I love you.

She flings herself into his arms, he gently and rather absently disengages himself.

VINCENT: What a melody—my God, what a melody!

He goes to the piano and begins to play "I'll See You Again," softly as a fox-trot. The rest of the band join in and then the ORCHESTRA. Everyone gets up "hey-heying" and Charlestoning and finally, led by DOLLY, they all go jazzing out through the double doors, followed by VINCENT and the members of the dance band. LADY SHAYNE is left alone, standing quite still. Suddenly she begins to laugh, a strange, cracked, con-

temptuous laugh; she rises to her feet, and then, suddenly holding out her arms wide, she sings:

SARI: Though my world has gone awry,
Though the end is drawing nigh,
I shall love you till I die,
Good-bye!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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